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Hello, and welcome to a series of podcasts brought to you by Accounting and Business Magazine. In this series, we'll be exploring current trends affecting the profession and how the professional accountant can respond to these changes. We speak to experts, including ACCA members from a range of fields, to bring different perspectives and practical advice.

00:35

Hello, I'm Monique McKenzie, Global PR Officer at ACCA. Today we're talking to Brisbane-based ACCA member and hype girl for accounting apps, Heather Smith, about how accountants can use social media platforms to enhance their careers in this new business landscape. Welcome to you, Heather.

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Thank you so much, Monique, for having me here on the podcast. I'm really excited to be here and hello to all the listeners who are listening in.

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Let's get started with the big picture. Technology is evolving so quickly and has opened up all sorts of channels to professional accountants looking to get ahead out there and market themselves or connect with their peers. What's the case for engaging with social media to achieve this aim?

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Social media online is giving you the opportunity to connect with people outside of your geographical region who may have an interest in areas that you are interested in and wish to explore further with other people. It is also an opportunity to help others and to seek support yourself.

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Thank you. Where should members start? What are some of the quick wins for those who haven't yet taken the plunge?

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My suggestion is to start on LinkedIn. LinkedIn is pitched as a professional social media platform. Connect with people that you know, people you've worked with, who you've had as colleagues, who you've studied with. Follow companies and areas that are of interest to you. Join the ACCA groups on LinkedIn. It's in those groups that you can start having discussions with other ACCA members or other accountants that you want to connect with. Once you've started exploring LinkedIn, you may want to start exploring Facebook, as lots of activity does happen in the closed Facebook groups but, due to the platform setup, you're notified much faster of the activities happening on Facebook. So Facebook seems to be a bit more of a connected environment. But do be mindful of the privacy settings across all the platforms, as you may not want business colleagues to see the personal information that you're sharing on Facebook.

02:44

Sticking with LinkedIn, what are some of the key features to have on your profile? I mean, where do you draw the line between professional and personal?

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Great question. Ensure that you have a LinkedIn profile that's showcasing what you actually do. It has various sections to fill out, so make sure you've gone in and filled them out correctly. Make sure you've tagged your location correctly. That's actually a change that's recently happened, you need to go in and tag it correctly. Make sure that you're properly linked to ACCA. I see that some people are linked to ACCA, but it's not the correct one. The red logo should be showing up on your profile, and it will show up at the top of your profile too, which is really good. Put in your profile section what you're actually looking for, what interests you, what connections you're trying to make. At the very top of LinkedIn, you've got the opportunity to put two pictures. One is the large rectangular banner picture and one is your profile picture. Think about them – what resonates with you? What will resonate with your community? Keep it professional, but it can still have personality, which is important. So have the personality, keep it professional, and go in and update LinkedIn on a regular basis. Don't just do it once and leave it there, because it will go stale. I typically take 15 minutes every month just to look over it. Is there anything I need to update? Is there anything in Profile that I need to do there? And publish posts. There's an area to go and put a post in, I encourage you to do that at least monthly. If you're reading a book, put in three things that you've learnt from the book. If you're attending a webinar, put in three things that you've learnt from attending the webinar. If you've gone to an event, if that's possible, what have you learnt? Take a photo of yourself or some people at the webinar. If you're listening to this podcast and you hear three things that resonate with you in the podcast, take a photo of yourself listening to us and put it up on LinkedIn and share that you're listening with us and tell us what you liked about it. People are drawn to that, people learn from you. You're a giver.

05:00

It's interesting – always include an engaging photo there. It can be of you, it can be of someone else. What that does is showcase what your interests are and what people can have a bit more of a conversation about with you. It warms up the conversation for when they meet you or when they want to connect with you.

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Great tips. So when it comes to engaging with employers over social media, how can an ACCA member get their attention through these channels?

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You'll find that some employees and industry leaders actually go in and post messages on LinkedIn. And you can monitor them. Depending what the message is, you can comment further on it, or you can respond to it. They might be searching for people or they might be searching for technology or they might be seeking how to do something. And you can drop in and share your insight with them over LinkedIn, which is a great way to start forming a relationship with them and showcase your areas of expertise. It may be that you're connecting one person with another person, or you can tell them where

to go or what to do. I remember someone posted on LinkedIn that they were driving to Bristol to attend an event. And I said, 'Why don't you drop in and see me on the way and we can catch up for coffee?' So you can form connections with people that way and connect with CEOs and industry leaders. The other thing is that a lot of events are posted on LinkedIn as well. You can monitor them and, if you can attend a free event, that can be another good one to do.

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That's a good tip. What about accountants in audit or insolvency or treasury, for instance? Are there specialist social media platforms for them?

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Within the LinkedIn and the Facebook platforms there are specialist areas that you can join. I just saw someone post on LinkedIn that they were just about to hit 50,000 people in their financial analytical Excel group. That's a really, really tight niche group, which would interest some really, really tight niche people in that particular area. A lot of areas then have subgroups, be it on Twitter, TikTok or Reddit. You need to go into the groups and try and understand how they are working. But then go and look for your tribe. Look for what interests you, use hashtags to search for what is interesting to you, jump in, read about it. And then, when you're feeling comfortable, make some comments. It's kind of like going into a cafe – you don't go into a cafe and start talking to everyone in the cafe, you go in, get involved with the ambience, sit down and then you start enjoying and joining in conversations. Treat it that way. You identify your communities on the platforms, then you connect with them and see whether they work for you. And you'll find that some really work for you, but then you'll pull out and move to other ones if they don't. So be quiet initially, learn, join in, respond, be helpful, be supportive.

08:16

How can we stay up to date with the latest innovations that social media offers? And what are some developments coming down the track?

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In terms of social media, video is really popular. A lot of people are watching video on social media. If you're going to use video, consider putting closed captioning on the video. There's a number of different options and ways for you to do that. Often people are watching the video in a place where they can't listen to it out loud. So they do need subtitles. I'm seeing people giving tax advice on Tik Tok at the moment. They're sort of shaking their booty and pointing in different areas, giving people advice. Your community need to listen to you in the way that resonates with them. For some people, that may be happening on TikTok, for other people that may be happening on LinkedIn. But I know that, when I put posts up there, I closed-caption everything. It's interesting, because people don't necessarily turn the volume on, but they get engaged with the conversation, then they start reading, and then they come in and probably watch it. The social media platforms also love video and they push it up higher in the algorithms so it's more likely to be seen. So that's a really good one. I did a series of videos that I published on LinkedIn with a fellow ACCA member, Kevin Fitzgerald from Singapore.

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We did 20 short three-minute videos and published them over a month. We had around 10,000 likes on those videos at the end of the month because people really got engaged with them. They were three minutes long, they were properly captioned, and people were really interested in what we were saying. They wanted to join in the conversation with us. Kevin was in Singapore, I was in Brisbane, and they were wherever they were. It was like we were sitting at a cafe talking and they just continued that conversation. So video is really great way to connect with people.

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That's fantastic. Where would you start with picking a topic for a video? Would you suggest it be about your specialist subject to show off? Or would it be just about getting connections?

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A marketing person is probably going to tell you to have a calendar planned out, have themes planned out and attack them as you go along. But, on a personal level, I'm probably a bit more scattergun in my approach to this. I jump on and talk about what's interesting me in that moment, what's happening to me in real life, and what resonates with me on that particular day. If I were to meet you in a cafe, you wouldn't have a pre-planned conversation. So that's the kind of natural flow that I have in those situations. Talk about things – maybe you've achieved something, maybe you're deep-diving into a work situation and you want help unpacking what's actually happening. Maybe you have a problem, and you're like, 'How do I deal with this? What would you say in this situation?' Also, it's not necessarily a numbers game. I did mention that we had this massive number of likes, but you don't necessarily need to go viral. As long as you can connect with one person and help one person, or they can connect with you, that is really satisfying. It's interesting because I find that a lot of people I meet tell me, 'Oh, I read all of the stuff that you put out there.' They've never liked any of it. They haven't even connected with me. But they still are reading it. And, for me, I'm trying to be there to be helpful to people. And that's enough. If it's helpful for one person, that's enough, and if it helps 10,000 people, fantastic. So don't worry about the numbers. Don't worry about putting something out there and it feels like tumbleweed. You'll slowly see what works, see what resonates with people, and keep building on that.

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That's really reassuring, and you make it sound so easy! Are you saying just do it and don't overthink it?

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Yes. As I mentioned before, focus on getting a great image, whether that's you at an event with some people smiling, colour, or nature, and share three things you've learnt. Whatever you did, whatever you've read, whatever event or webinar you've been to, share those and encourage the people reading the post to take a step. Have a call to action. It could be: what are your thoughts on this? What books are you reading at the moment? It's just amazing. I've been doing a series about business books. And I asked, 'What are you going to read in 2021?' I now have 103 books on that list, just from having that repeated conversation with people, which is really quite a simple conversation. But lots of great books, because everyone is interested in books, everyone's got a best book that they like to talk about. Some people will be attracted to what you say. Not everyone needs to like it. Don't stress about that, that's

completely fine. As we've been through, it's not necessarily a numbers game – put it out there and see what happens. Sometimes I might put it into a smaller group and test it. And if something works really well in a smaller group, I might take it out and rework it, add something more to it, and then put it somewhere else in a bigger platform. Go from the smaller venue to the bigger venue and work your way up.

14:08

If there's one thing that listeners could do today to make a step in the right direction and take charge of their next career step or career move, what would that be?

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I think it's really important to have an authentic, engaging profile photo and have that standardised across all of your profiles. Within the profiles, within your posts, you might put different photos in there, but have that standardised photo, so that people know, when they go from TikTok to Reddit to Facebook to LinkedIn to Pinterest, whatever platform they're on, they know it's you. There's some consistency there. And you can put in different colours, fragrances, flavours, whatever it is, in the post underneath, but get that professional photo done. You may well have to pay for that. If you're an accountant in small practice, I always just find a photography client and use one of my own clients and do a contra deal with them. Not that I'm giving you advice, but that's what I always do. I always try and find a client and do a contra deal on that. That can work in your favour. It's a win-win situation for both of you.

15:23

Great tip, Heather. Is there anything else we haven't covered that you think is key for our members setting out on this social media journey?

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By taking the time to create a few posts on LinkedIn, when you actually meet your connections virtually or you have an interview, that person has something to talk with you about – the book that you read, the group project or charity that you participated in, the award you won. In the accounting profession, many people have qualifications, okay, we've all got this standard set of qualifications. We know that ACCA members love numbers, love accounting, have a qualification, are hardworking. But it's your personality and your attitude that will differentiate you from the other people out there. And you have the opportunity to drop that into social media. Even if you are the biggest nerd in the world and you only wear Converse shoes and you love Lego. That's completely fine. Even if you put a little Lego man doing some little activity up on LinkedIn every day, you'll become a legend. You know, people like that personality. Be aware that your next employer, your next business colleague, is going to cyberstalk you and they're going to go through your profiles and find everything that you've put up there. So make sure that you're happy for people to see what you're putting up there and what's already there.

16:51

Great. Well, we're out of time. I just want to thank you very much for participating today, Heather.

16:58

Thank you so much, Monique, for having me on. I've really enjoyed being here with you. And thank you to all the listeners who listened in.

17:06

We hope that our listeners have found this very useful. Thanks for tuning in.

17:10

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