



# A Skills-Based Profile is a Personal Brand

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**Authored by Katherine Townsend Kiernan**, Burning Glass Institute  
**Stuart Andreason**, Burning Glass Institute

Personal branding is critical in today’s professional world and will likely grow as advances in technology and communications increasingly individualize job matching. In the workforce development field, we have seen this shift displayed as “skills-based practices.” Degrees or titles have been used as a proxy for skills, but employers have seen the quality of those matches decline. A worker’s “brand” is their skills-based profile. Essentially workers must find ways to articulate their skills and experiences on new technology-based and digital job-matching platforms.

Since the end of the Great Recession, professional social media has grown exponentially. Estimates suggest that between Q1 of 2009 and Q3 of 2023, LinkedIn’s user base has grown from 37 million to 950 million people. Advances in job- and skill-matching technology driven by professional social media, coupled with the growth of changing work arrangements like the expanding gig economy, make building an online presence all the more important for workers of all ages.

## **Adapting to the Gig Economy**

Both the gig economy and online professional networking have their roots in the tech boom of the early 2000s and gained momentum through the Great Recession after Gen X and Baby Boomers had already gotten a strong start in their careers. Though the gig economy is not without its flaws, it has created both opportunities for entrepreneurship and fulfillment for workers who may not be able to obtain a traditional full-time role. It also has served as a “lifeboat” employment arrangement for many workers during difficult economic times.<sup>1</sup> Workers who are best able to articulate and market their skills have fared better in the gig economy and the labor market more broadly. Those who have been successful at leveraging digital platforms have had additional recent success— social media and digital professional networking are marketable skills unto themselves, but also critical for broader opportunities in the digital gig economy. Digital gig workers rely on a very unique type of network to succeed, a type of network that is unfamiliar to many older workers, who are not themselves digital or social media natives.

While older workers may face new ways of engaging in work, they are very valuable and more likely to stick with their current work opportunities. Findings from a recently released research report from the Burning Glass Institute and AARP show that older workers spend longer in their companies than many of their younger counterparts.

***“In fact, older workers are 62% less likely to move to another employer in any given year than their younger colleagues. Even at age 69, the average worker is expected to stay on at their current employer for four more years, which is one to three years longer than an early career worker.”<sup>2</sup>***

Longevity with an employer reduces the need for strong job-seeking networks, which we see in the distribution of worker’s online profiles: ***“Workers 55 and older make up 23% of the labor market, our research shows that they account for only 14% of online profiles.”<sup>3</sup>*** This means that employers are missing extremely valuable candidates when they advertise on common online platforms. This practice can be both discriminatory and/or inefficient. Older workers have desirable skills that employers seek. They disproportionately represent skills of leadership, professionalism, and mentorship. In addition to strong people skills, older workers tend to have high levels of technical knowledge that come with many years of learning on the job and decision-making. Ensuring that the skills and assets older workers possess are articulated in online profiles can serve workers and employers alike.

## **Why Older Workers Make Great Contingent Workers**

While their job-searching history doesn’t predispose older workers to digital networking or the gig economy, their lifestyle does. Contingent workers often struggle in their roles because pay can be sporadic or cyclical. If this is an individual’s only source of income, it presents obvious challenges. On the flip side, if a person has a base level of income—including retirement savings or income—and simply needs to supplement, gig work can provide that extra income.

Many older workers report that they want to use their skills and stay connected to the labor market but with a higher level of flexibility than traditional full-time roles provide. While many gig workers struggle to find affordable healthcare on the marketplace, workers over 65 have access to government-sponsored healthcare programs that free them from the need to maintain a long-term employment contract.

Policy makers should ensure marketplace competitiveness for nontraditional candidates, including older workers. Skill-based transitions, ones that rely on identifying and articulating the skills workers have already learned through experience, can serve as pathways to an improved and inclusive gig worker marketplace. The **BGI-AARP Playbook for the Inclusive Hiring of Later Career Workers** highlights occupations, sectors, and skills that have an overrepresentation of older workers. Skill-based transitions give employers new pools of workers to source from that embody the flexibility that the marketplace now demands. Supporting marketplace competitiveness for all workers, including older workers, would promote equity by reaching candidates of all ages that meet employers’ precise needs. Since online platforms don’t harness the full power of experienced worker networks, new ideas for modernizing that connection are critical.

## How Employers Can Contribute to an Inclusive Gig Marketplace

Success also depends on the quality of work each “gig” offers. Employers, too, can contribute to a successful and inclusive gig marketplace. Taking what they know from the loyalty offered as Gen X and Baby Boomers were coming of age, employers can reimagine contingent work to promote the same positive relationships. Benefits may not include pension or healthcare plans, but they should reflect the needs of gig workers.

Integrating older workers into the digital and gig economy can provide significant opportunities for older workers and for employers who struggle to find talent. Often this can be as straightforward as introducing digital professional networking to older workers and helping them find ways to market their skills. These strategies provide additional methods for engaging older workers, who bring significant assets to both employers and the workplace. Finally, older workers can take control of their path by owning their personal brand—their skills profile. Updating their brand will help them take control of their path and find roles that fill everyone’s needs. Older workers can help advocate for higher job quality for contingent workers that will benefit all gig workers and the economy at large.

For workers, it offers a way to stay connected with their community, build a financial buffer, and pass on skills and knowledge that are critical for a smooth transition to the next generation.

<sup>1</sup> Jackson, E. (2020): “Availability of the Gig Economy and Long Run Labor Supply Effects for the Unemployed,” Working Paper. [https://economics.nd.edu/assets/348621/jackson\\_jmp.pdf](https://economics.nd.edu/assets/348621/jackson_jmp.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Townsend Kiernan, K., Leiden, E., Sigelman, M. (2023): “A Playbook for the Inclusive Hiring of Later-Career Workers,” <https://www.burningglassinstitute.org/research/a-playbook-for-the-inclusive-hiring-of-later-career-workers>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.