Keeping a low profile is the last thing a researcher needs. The advent of the digital era could be the best thing that has happened to research since the apple fell on Isaac Newton’s head. The steps you need to take to become e-visible are easier than you would think, and if you run into any snags, help is at hand in the form of the Unisa Library.

Research Insights spoke to Leslie Adriaanse, Personal Librarian for the College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences, who is doing her doctorate on research e-visibility.

**What is research e-visibility?**

Most research published via digital workflow processes generates a digital footprint – an online presence. An online presence means that as a researcher your research is available online, making you and your research discoverable and accessible online. E-visibility embodies online presence, researcher discoverability and research accessibility. By being more discoverable online as a researcher, your research is more accessible, retrievable and downloadable for other researchers to use or cite; hence an increase in your accessibility. Research e-profiles have become vehicles for e-visibility – increasing online presence, researcher discoverability and research output accessibility.

**Research Insights: What are the benefits of being e-visible?**

Research that is available online is much more likely to be downloaded and cited. Online articles are cited four-and-a-half times more than offline articles, and it is generally accepted that research performance is measured by citation counts and related bibliometrics. It is also
generally accepted that a higher citation rate translates into higher research performance, which means increased research impact on the subject discipline.

Research Insights: Is it true that the National Research Foundation (NRF) now requires researchers applying for rating or grants to have an online presence?

The NRF is in the process of integrating the ORCID identifier into all application and grant management business processes and systems, and will allow researchers to include their ORCID identifier when updating their CVs. (ORCID stands for Open Researcher and Contributor ID and is a unique code that identifies an academic author.)

The NRF is also considering the downstream integration benefits to both researchers and the NRF, including automated processes for uploading research output records into a researcher’s profile and annual research reports.

This means that the NRF requires all researchers applying for NRF funding and rating to have an ORCID identifier. ORCID allows for integration with various research profiles such as the ISI’s ResearcherID and Scopus Author ID via dynamic profile links. This includes linking your online research identity with your research output and the Hirsch index (h-index) showing your citation performance as a researcher.

Research Insights: What does it actually mean to have an online presence?

Having an online presence means establishing a research e-profile that contains your biographical information and research affiliations, your research output and links to performance bibliometrics such as h-index citation counts and altmetrics, which measure the attention your research is receiving in the form of social media metrics, for example views, downloads and readers.

Research Insights: Where and how should a researcher have an online presence?

The most important traditional research e-profiles to have are ORCID, ResearcherID, Scopus Author ID and Google Scholar. Once you have the traditional research e-profiles, it is easy to register e-profiles on academic social media platforms like Mendeley (http://www.mendeley.com), ResearchGate (http://www.researchgate.net) and Academia.edu (http://www.academia.edu).

The Unisa Institutional Repository (IR) is also an important resource to upload all your Unisa research output to increase your e-visibility.

Research Insights: It sounds quite daunting. How and where do I start?

I recommend starting with Google Scholar because it immediately generates an e-profile and indicates your Google Scholar h-index. You can register for Google Scholar in three easy steps – all you need to get started is a Gmail account, your institutional email address to verify your research affiliation and following steps to select your research as indexed on Google Scholar.

Next, I recommend setting up a persistent unique ORCID identity, which is also quick and easy. You simply access the ORCID website at http://www.orcid.org and register an ORCID account. Follow the given instructions and use your Unisa email to verify your research affiliation.

You then use the dynamic links to enhance your ORCID record with other profiles such as Scopus Author ID, ResearcherID and LinkedIn as a professional e-profile, and populate ORCID with research output linked to the e-profiles.

You can further enhance your ORCID identifier by adding links to websites from academic social media tools such as ResearchGate, Academia.edu, Google Scholar and Mendeley. These dynamic links to the various e-profiles strengthen your discoverability as a researcher and increase accessibility to your research output across both traditional research and academic social media platforms. Registering and maintaining these research profiles increase your e-visibility.

Research Insights: Whom can I turn to for help if I need it?

The Unisa Library has a dedicated team of Personal Librarians tasked with assisting researchers in understanding e-visibility and the benefits of being e-visible. We conduct training sessions on e-visibility, the types of research e-profiles that are available, and how to register and maintain the various research e-profiles to increase e-visibility. We provide assistance according to the needs of researchers, either through one-on-one training sessions or through group training sessions.

Research Insights: Are there any drawbacks to establishing and maintaining an e-profile?

Not as far as I am concerned. Research e-profiles have become a wonderful tool for marketing and promoting research; however, researchers themselves need to buy into the notion that they would benefit by being more e-visible. Successful e-profiles entail researchers taking ownership of the marketing of their research by maintaining e-profiles and ensuring they have accurate citations for accurate h-indexes. Fortunately, maintaining e-profiles is easy as these profiles are designed to be user-friendly.