



# CONNECTIONS

EMPOWERING EMPLOYMENT SUCCESS

# Virtual Networking



Networking is an essential component of any successful job search. A strong network can provide referrals or contact within a company that gives you an edge when applying for positions. While Virtual Networking will never take the place of connecting in person, it is a very important part of today's career development strategy. This workshop will cover:

- **What is Networking?**
- **What is Virtual Networking?**
- **Why Networking Matters**
- **Developing a Networking Strategy for Your Job Search**
- **Networking on LinkedIn**

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## WHAT IS NETWORKING?

**Networking is nothing more than getting to know people!** Whether you realize it or not, you are networking every day and everywhere you go. You are networking when you strike up a conversation with the person next to you in line, introduce yourself to other parents at your child's school, meet a friend of a friend, catch up with a former co-worker, or stop to chat with your neighbor.

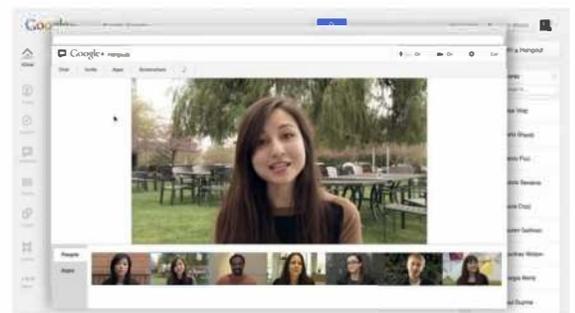
Professional networking is about making contacts and building relationships that can lead to jobs or other career-related opportunities. When networking is done correctly, it can help you obtain leads, referrals, advice, information, and other career support. Professional networking is an essential component of any successful job search.

## WHAT IS VIRTUAL NETWORKING?

These days, a lot of professional networking goes on online. Virtual Networking is the process of growing your professional contacts and social media networks via online communication channels.

When most people think of professional networking virtually, they think of LinkedIn. LinkedIn is a professional networking site, designed to help people make business connections, share their experiences and resumes, and find jobs. But professional networking virtually can take place within many online platforms.

You can identify a [Slack Channel](#), [Twitter Chat](#) or [Google Hangout](#) where other professionals within your industry gather to discuss current trends or issues. Identify the discussions that will be useful to build your network, plan to join a session, and be engaged in the conversation.



Another social media platform which allows professionals to virtually link with each other based on shared interests is Meetup. Search for virtual [Meetup](#) groups in your area and get involved. [Event Brite](#) also lists virtual professional events. We also suggest that you consider broadening your network by looking at virtual networking events outside of your immediate area. Groups such as [Professional Networking Events](#) and [Tech Events](#) provide great opportunities to meet others within your industry who you may not otherwise have the opportunity to meet in person.

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Additional online networking groups to investigate include [Ryze](#) or [Business Networking International](#).

While reaching out to people virtually can feel daunting, it's important to connect with other professionals in order to expand your network. Reach out to people who have a different background than your own in order to increase the breadth of your network. If you are considering a career transition, use virtual networking events to ask questions about how others got into the job or career that you are considering. Find out what skills are valued, what training is needed and what people love about their jobs.

If you approach networking online with the right attitude of generosity, appreciation and consistency, you will grow your network and, over time, you will see a valuable return for the time and effort invested.

## WHY NETWORKING MATTERS

Every professional should network! People who intentionally work to grow their networks are 42% - 74% more likely to be promoted from their current role. Research also shows that networking is vital to staying employed, additional salary growth, and job satisfaction. For job seekers, networking **also makes you much more likely to land a job**. However, many job seekers are hesitant to take advantage of networking because they are afraid of being seen as pushy, annoying, or self-serving.

But the truth is networking isn't about using other people or aggressively promoting yourself – **it's about building relationships!**

Networking is the best way to find a job because:

- **People do business primarily with people they know and like.** Resumes and cover letters alone are often too impersonal to convince employers to hire you.
- **Job listings tend to draw piles of applicants,** which puts you in intense competition with many other job seekers. Networking makes you a recommended member of a much smaller pool.
- **The job you want may not even be advertised.** Networking leads to information and job leads, often before a formal job description is created or a job announced.



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## Developing a Networking Strategy for Your Job Search

If your goal is finding a job, changing your job, or growing on the job, you need to strategize accordingly. People often make the mistake of thinking that networking is just about handing out business cards, but successful networking also involves research. Professional networking is about getting to know people well. An effective virtual networking strategy has four essential components: organizing, developing, expanding and following up.

### First Get Organized

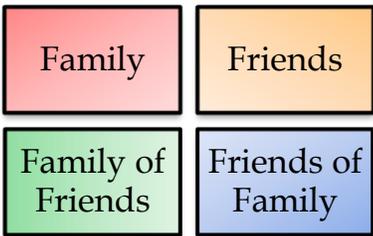
Create a spreadsheet or other type of record of your contacts, including their cell phone numbers and email addresses. Include dates of communication, and notes about your conversations. If you get a business card from a new connection, make a note on the back of the card about your conversation with them and when to follow up with them. As your network grows, this type of organized data will help you to keep track of your connections and the details of your relationships.

### Develop Your Existing Network

When it comes to developing business relationships, stop thinking about the word “business” and focus on “relationships.” Your network will include people you know well, acquaintances, and referrals. If “connecting” seems hard, start by “reconnecting.” An excellent first step is to reconnect with people you already know, but whom you may not have stayed in touch.

#### **The Four F’s of Networking**

You may believe you don’t know anyone who can help with your job search. But you know more people than you think and there’s an excellent chance that at least a few of these people know someone who can point you to a job opening. Consider the Four F’s of Networking, which are Family, Friends, Family of Friends and Friends of Family.



Your existing network is already extensive. Start talking to all your family members, friends, neighbors, co-workers, colleagues, even casual acquaintances. Consider people you know from previous jobs, high school, college, church, your child’s school, the gym, or your neighborhood. Think about people you’ve met through your close connections: your sister’s co-worker, your best friend’s boss, your college roommate’s spouse, friends of your parents, your uncle’s business partner. Don’t forget to include people like your doctor, landlord, accountant, dry cleaner, or yoga instructor.

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This existing network also includes your social networks online, such as Facebook or LinkedIn. Online you have a database of people you know from school and beyond. Categorize them (friends, family, co-workers) and approach them also to see if they know any contacts in a particular field or company.

When you talk to them, don't ask for a job – a request for a job comes with a lot of pressure. You want your contacts to become allies in your job search, so ask for information or insight instead. If they can hire you or refer you to someone who can, they will. If not, you haven't put them in the uncomfortable position of turning you down or telling you they can't help. If you are asking for a reference or referral, you will want to ask people if they would be comfortable recommending you to people they know. If the answer is yes, obtain the names of three to four people and their contact information. Ask the person who is vouching for you if they would call the person on your behalf or send an email introducing you.

As you are organizing your existing network, look at the five to ten people you spent the most time with in the last three months. These people are the group with whom you have invested the most time developing a relationship. Are you happy with the way they are influencing you? Are they contributing to positive growth in your life? If they are not, find another person who belongs to that smaller group and invest in getting to know them more.

## **Expand Your Network**

### **Attend Virtual Events and Join Groups**

Attending different virtual networking events such as webinars, online discussions, conferences, and lectures will allow you the opportunities to virtually network with people who are in your career fields or similar fields. If you are struggling to find these events, websites like Meetup and Eventbrite list different events and groups in your area. Community organizations and groups also host networking and get-to-know-you events. Your college or graduate school can also be a rich source of networking possibilities, and a great place to meet new people.

When you attend these events, have a purpose in mind. Are you participating in the event to learn more about a topic, to meet people, or to connect with someone at a specific company? Having a particular goal can be helpful, even if it is just to "Introduce myself to two people in my field and connect on LinkedIn." Have your talking points and elevator pitch prepared and practiced to show confidence and familiarity with sharing about yourself.

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## Approaching New Contacts Online

When you are attending a virtual networking event, dive in and participate when the “chat” begins. Prepare your personal introduction ahead of time and practice it so that you feel comfortable and natural when you introduce yourself. Do some research about the group or the meeting topic and have a few key questions prepared.

Once you have identified a potential contact, reach out and indicate how you became familiar with them. Let them know that you admire their industry reputation, experience or whatever is noteworthy. From there, make sure to engage in a collaborative conversation by asking questions, seeking advice or acknowledging one of their recent professional accomplishments.

Now that you are acquainted, be proactive in building that relationship. You can send a relevant article or blog post with a personalized note or ask them for guidance or an opinion. Be careful, however, to be sensitive to their time and only ask questions to which they can provide a quick response.

Finally, when it comes to virtual networking, the key is visibility and consistency. As appropriate, look for opportunities to engage with your virtual contacts. This can include reposting their posts, answering a question that is asked on a professional platform, or sharing a thoughtful response to one of their updates.

Think long-term and strive to engage in some small way every few weeks. The goal is to make your name familiar to them so that when the moment is right you can meet them in person. After you meet them in person, use social media to keep the connection alive. Virtual networking will never replace connecting in person, but it enables you to build and maintain relationships with key contacts around the world.



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## Start the Conversation

Networking can sometimes feel like a one-way street to extract any benefits without giving anything in return. In reality, networking is all about helping people. Approach people with one goal: to listen to them and offer insight when you think you can help. Actively showing interest in other people is powerful. Listening to what they have to say and asking them to tell you more is all it takes. When people speak, the best responses from a listener are those that are engaged, enthusiastic, curious, and supportive. Ask questions. Be excited. Ask for details.

During your conversations, take the opportunity to ask the following types of questions:

1. **How can I help you?** Asking this question allows you to add value immediately with a suggestion, a referral, or an opportunity, and it will establish you as a giver, and potentially someone they want to know.
2. **What ideas or suggestions do you have for me?** Asking for ideas and suggestions allows the people you are talking with to add value to you as you have (hopefully) added value to them.
3. **Who do you know that I should talk to?** The connection you need may be in this individual's network, and the only way you can find out is with this question.

Think of two people who should know each other and reach out to introduce them! Follow up with them later to learn whether the introduction was worthwhile, so you can get better at making introductions. Practice!

## The Hidden Job Market

The “hidden job market” refers to jobs that are not advertised online. Many companies do not advertise all of their positions. These roles get filled by word of mouth and employee referrals. Some competitive companies, such as Google, hire less than 1% of their job applicants from online! That’s why networking is so crucial to finding a job.



Adopting a networking lifestyle – a lifestyle of connecting and helping others in good times and bad - will help you find the right job, make valuable connections in your chosen field, and stay focused and motivated during your job search.

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## Follow-up

One of the most common problems that people have in successful networking is how to follow up. "Great! I met someone who seems like a good connection! Now, what do I do?" Think of the other person first. A lot of people look at the idea of helping others and say, "Gosh, that's going to be time-consuming, or exhausting, or put me at risk of being exploited." However, if you can just take a couple of minutes every day to try to help someone in a way that is a small commitment, you may find that it was actually a great benefit to them.

When you make a connection, write a note about the conversation or exchange you had with the person. Include details of your discussion in your contact list. Include where the person worked in the past, and other memorable or interesting facts that you have learned about this person.

- Most importantly, follow up promptly and regularly once you've made an initial contact.
- Make notes of the dates that you reached out to contacts in your networking spreadsheet.
- Keep a list of ideas or stories that you can share with contacts regularly to keep the relationship alive.
- Send email updates or have conversations with your networking goal in mind.

If you have asked people for help, don't just disappear. If you notify your references that you have applied for a particular position and that they may receive a phone call for a recommendation, follow up and let your contact know what happened as a result of their assistance.

Send contacts updates on what's happening with you and what you have achieved. It is also smart to reciprocate and send along information that may help them. It is this give and take that creates reliable connections for the future.

Don't be a pest, but keep your network warm by maintaining an active PR campaign. Spend a few hours each week, sending emails to those who have helped you in any way. Focus on what you can do for the people in your network. Perhaps you can establish a mutually beneficial connection between two members of your existing network that will help to strengthen your relations with both parties.

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## Networking on LinkedIn

Whether you are just starting your job search, wrapping it up or cultivating influence and credibility within your industry, networking on LinkedIn is so much more than collecting contacts. When you are job searching, you should spend at least 30 minutes each day on LinkedIn making new connections, endorsing connections, following companies, joining and participating in groups and sharing information to grow your network.

### Be Pro-Active on Your Profile

Leaving comments on LinkedIn posts is one of the best ways to drive profile views. Don't just comment "love this!" but add comments that create value and stimulate the conversation. Posting thought provoking comments on the right posts will create excellent visibility for yourself. People are more likely to want to connect with you if you prove to be a useful resource within your industry.



It is generally not a good idea to ask someone for a meeting or conversation during your first interaction with them on LinkedIn. You should earn the right to ask someone for a chat or a favor by building a connection with them. You do this by finding a common professional interest, leaving a thoughtful comment, or showing interest in what they're doing or sharing.

### Use LinkedIn to Follow Up After Events

After you attend a virtual networking event, follow up by sending new contacts a LinkedIn connection request. Ensure that you send a customized note to remind them where you met. For example:

*"Hi [Name], it was great meeting you at the [event]. I enjoyed our conversation about [Topic] and would love to connect with you on LinkedIn. I would love to meet up for coffee and continue chatting further about it. Best, (your name)."*

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## Network Backwards

Create a list of 20 companies where you would like to work. Research each company thoroughly to find out who you may be connected to at the company and who could potentially refer you to a hiring manager. You can “follow” the companies you have chosen on LinkedIn. Following a company on LinkedIn, allows you to look at profiles of people who work at that company. You could also ask your company connections about specific people you'd like to meet. This method is possible using LinkedIn, since you're able to see your first-degree connections (at least if they haven't hidden them!).

If there is no one at the company that you know, try to build connections with people who currently work at the companies where you desire to work! Start by reviewing the profiles of people who are in similar positions that you would like to have at that company. Make notes about the professional associations they belong to, the Groups that they follow, the schools they attended, or if you both belonged to a sorority or fraternity. Reach out via LinkedIn to people at the company, in the HR department, and in the departments in which you would like to work.

Find someone inside your ideal company to email the human resource department on your behalf with a strong referral. If a current employee writes to their human resource contact, saying, "My neighbor went to college with Sue. I've talked to her, and she sounds very knowledgeable. I'd like to forward her résumé," that contact is much more likely to take a look at an unsolicited résumé than if your resume came in through the ordinary mail.

Many large companies offer financial incentives for referrals that lead to successful hires. But even if the employee doesn't end up with money through their firm's employee referral program, the real motivation is helping a friend or contact get a foot in the door! Remember, networking goes both ways. The person who provides a referral for you may need your referral someday soon.

## Keep Developing Your Skills

An important part of successful networking is to do something every single day. Take the long view and connect with at least one person professionally every day. Make it a habit. The more networking you do, the better you will be.

**Remember, good networkers build bridges, and great networkers build communities! They make sure that their contacts get to know each other, exponentially increasing the connections and opportunities.**

