



## Cultivating Connections and Contacts for Social Networking

Three ideas to try now

You've committed to the power of social networking, and understand the role it can play in expanding your sales and marketing efforts. But once you have added your current business connections, friends and family, how do you grow your network? Here are a couple of tactics to swiftly and effectively build your connection and contact base.

### Join an Online Group

Groups on LinkedIn, Yahoo! And other sites are virtual communities of interest that can be invaluable in building your network. But there is a little work involved, naturally. When you request to join a group, the group owner will review your request and, with luck, approve your membership. Once you have joined the group, you can become a good citizen by contributing to that community. There are lots of different ways: answer a question, post a comment to a discussion, start a discussion, post relevant articles and topics that may be of interest to the greater membership.

- 1) Whatever your industry, there is probably a corresponding professional association. Invite your contacts from that association, or if you don't currently have any, check the website for either program or membership contacts and extend an invite. Professional associations can connect job seekers not just to new contacts, but to contacts in a desired field.
- 2) Alumni associations offer another wealth of contacts and connections. An additional benefit may be connection to a local chapter for social and sporting events.
- 3) Interest Groups give you an opportunity to learn more about your industry, area of expertise and ability to explore and discuss ideas. In these groups, you'll have the opportunity to offer Subject Matter Expertise (SME) answers or ideas. The real power of social networking allows for this type of idea sharing and collaboration between people who may never have had a chance to engage.

### Put those old business cards to use!

- 1) Whenever I am introduced to someone, meet people in a business meeting, meet a potential client or run across someone in my industry or a complementary one, I forward a LinkedIn request within 72 hours of meeting them. This not only solidifies the relationship while the memory is fresh, it allows me to follow up or introduce next steps as appropriate.

- 2) Go through that stack of old business cards and send a connection request. Using the invite box, you can add a line that states where you have met (if you remember!) or just a cordial greeting.
- 3) Past clients and former colleagues and management are all candidates to re-connect.

Connect through your connections

- 1) Take a look at your online connections to see their connections. LinkedIn offers several ways to connect or ask your connection to make the introduction.
- 2) When you are in a group, you can review the list of other members and invite them to become a connection.

As you grow your connections list, make sure that you don't abuse the privilege of connecting. Be mindful of online etiquette and NEVER spam or disparage. If you give your network care and feeding, it will in fact take care of you!