

Working It!

How to Make
the Most Out of
Social Networking
to Enhance Your
Career Prospects

By Mary Colleen Liburdi



MySpace, Facebook, Bebo, Friendster, Xanga...if you don't know what these are or haven't visited them in the last month, you're in the minority. Because of websites like these, social networking has never been so popular and is definitely here to stay. We all know what social networking is in our regular life – a chance to expand the number of our school, professional or social contacts by making connections through other people. It's one of the best ways to learn, communicate, shop, gain friends and even get a job. Now the internet has made connecting and networking to anyone, anywhere, easier than ever.

Anyone browsing the web knows there are more social networking sites than you can count and in every category imaginable, so it's no wonder that it's hugely popular. According to the Consumer Internet Barometer, one out of four people online visit social networks. People are utilizing these online resources to such a great extent that in the month of June 2008, 189.9 million Americans visited social networking sites (ComScore.com). So if you are one of those millions of Americans, you are navigating through a sea of communication decisions, networking opportunities and profile updates. How can you make the most of your time spent networking and capitalize on the power of these relationships to further your future career plans? And how can you do so while keeping your information safe and maintaining a professional image? Take the right steps to ensure your social networking becomes a real asset to all you want to accomplish.

Navigating Through It All...

If you haven't set up a profile on a social networking site, you might want to consider talking with your friends and family and see where they spend

their time. Facebook and MySpace are the leading social networking sites. Here are some basic statistics on these sites according to their respective websites:

- Facebook has more than 63 million active users.
- Facebook has seen an average of 250,000 new registrations per day since January 2007, with an average of 3% weekly growth since January 2007.
- MySpace has 185 Million Registered Users.
- MySpace has 350,000 new registrations each day.

But these sites are just two examples of the many opportunities for networking. Sites such as Bebo are tied more to the high school and college audiences, while LinkedIn is directed at professional networking. Some sites offer online diaries and journals. Xanga allows users to start their own free journal and share it with friends.

Even more interesting are the numerous networking sites that appeal to the medical community and even nursing in particular. CampusRN2RN is a social networking site, developed by the folks from the CampusRN. This site geared towards current and future nurses, allows users to share their thoughts and experiences with

each other. Presently there are 760 members. Here are some other sites that you may want to visit:

- **Nurse Connect:** Offering communities as well as education information, this site offers job information and blogs.
- **Nurse's Café:** Focused on practicing nurses, this site offers opportunities to connect with nurses all over the world and allows you to search by specialty.
- **NurseLinkUp:** This site is primarily tied to social networking with interesting articles on nursing education, job hunting and case studies written by other members.
- **LinkedIn:** A website to allow professionals to connect with each other, this site allows for job opportunities and connections to people in all different fields.

What makes your membership to these sites so important is your ability to really connect with other students and professionals in your field. Do you need advice on schools or taking the NCLEX exam? Are you planning on moving across the country to start your career? Want the latest information on preventing medication errors? Social networking allows for the fun of connecting with and making new friends but it provides so much more. It allows for a wide spectrum of opportunities to share who you are with others and reconnect with people from your past. It allows you the chance to "profile" yourself, featuring all the great things that you've accomplished and share them with friends, professors, prospective employers, and recruiters.

Networking Your Way to Career Success

As you become more and more savvy using the tools on social networking sites, you can really harness the power of your "connections" and build a strong foundation for your

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ascent into your professional life.

If you decide that you want to use a social networking site to build professional or educational relationships, you need to make sure that your profile contains no information that could be used against you in a job interview situation or possibly even in violation of your school policies or code of conduct. Remember, if you're online, so are millions of others. Are some of these "con-networkers" potential employers or members of your faculty? They can view your profile and make their own judgments. It's always better to have information online that leaves no opportunities for misinterpretation. The *BusinessWeek* Internet Job-Hunting Annual Report reported that many employers pre-screened applicants using social networking profiles, disqualifying many when they found incriminating photos and information. In the same report, 35% of these employers eliminated candidates based on this online information. In addition to prospective employers, recruiters use social networking sites as standard practice to recruit potential candidates for companies. With the wrong information, you may be taking yourself out of the running for great jobs.

You may also want to check the sites you visit and see if they allow you to search for potential companies or institutions that you would like to work for.

Check with your online friends and see what connections they may have. Perhaps they know someone through their "networks" and can connect you with a decision-maker or contact that can make the difference in your job-hunting. Consider joining professional associations (like NSNA) and network with other members as well. NSNA not only provides opportunities to network one-on-one, like the meeting exhibit halls, workshops, and focus sessions, but NSNA's Leadership University has a bulletin board and chat capabilities that allow members to interact in between conferences and conventions.

Include these professional association activities in your profile and allow this to be used as part of the search or tags in your profile. You may hit pay dirt!

One additional critical component of the social networking that can lead to your ability to compile great information libraries is social bookmarking. Compiling lists of links to information is a great and powerful tool for educational and career enhancement. Sites such as Digg, StumbleUpon, Del.icio.us and Mixx allow you to

bookmark websites as well as share your bookmarks with others. In return, you can compile lists of links that are recommended by others and tag them with particular key words to facilitate easy access. Now you have exposure to information based on user recommendations and users who may have similar interests and background to you.

Some Do's and Don'ts

Enjoying the benefits of social networking can make a significant difference in your educational and professional success. As with many new tools, they are only as good as your ability to use them and capitalize on their power. Here's a review and some additional suggestions on the how to get the most out of "networking" for success.

- **Don't** trust all users on social networking sites. Just because they seem to have a familiar address or they have an ".edu" extension, that doesn't necessarily make them a safe person to network with. Be careful about sharing too much personal information with anyone online. Information can be forwarded easily and mis-used.
- **Do** evaluate your profiles and postings to make sure you feel comfortable with the information posted. Would you feel comfortable with a potential employer reading your Facebook profile? How about the dean of your school?
- **Do** Google your name and see what results you receive. Is there information that you do not want to be in the public domain? Understand what information is out there and start to control it.
- **Don't** post personal information such as your class schedules, cell phone number, where you're going socially, or your home address. You just don't know who is reading your profile.
- **Do** post accomplishments, interests, and connect with other users who have similar interests and career ambitions. Compile a profile that shows the best of what you have to offer.
- **Don't** post incriminating photos or videos online. Make sure that you let your friends know that you do not want your image used in their profiles unless they have your permission.
- **Do** utilize your privacy settings as part of your profile so you can

control who has access to your information.

Social networking can be an extremely powerful tool that can become critical to your everyday communications and relationship building. Knowing how to use this tool properly and understanding the vast and huge group of users that have access to your information, will allow you to make informed decisions on what you post. Make the most of your travels in the world of social networking and enjoy all of the opportunities it offers. It can be an exceptional tool to assist in all of your educational and career building endeavors. ©

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Mary Colleen Liburdi is Senior Technology Product Manager at Delmar Cengage Learning, Albany, NY.
