

Network Safely Online

By John Rossheim, Monster Senior Contributing Writer

In case you haven't noticed, the old boy network for finding jobs isn't old anymore, isn't all boys and now prefers high-end coffee shops to exclusive clubs.

When not sipping lattes, many networkers in the professional world now meet around electronic water coolers, sharing career buzz via Internet media ranging from e-mail and message boards to Web sites, chat and Blogs.

This cyberspace of job hunting abounds with useful information and helpful people; it's also full of misinformation, dead ends and the occasional economic or social predator who's looking to take advantage of people. Follow these tips for getting the most from online networking while protecting yourself.

Six Ways to Surf Toward Your Next Job

Join Genuine Affinity Groups

Look for an online community focused on a specific affinity, whether it's your industry, occupation, city, alma mater or former employer. "I looked for every possible membership group I had any affiliation with," says Tim Johnston, author of **"Diary of a Job Search"**.

Be the Hub of a Group

Some of your strongest connections may be to ex-colleagues at a small startup that dot-bombed. Form a group with them, or if no one from your alma mater has started up a local alumni group, or the group lies fallow, get it going yourself, whether with a Web site, newsletter, blog or weekly chat. But commit before you launch; it takes time and effort to put karma on your side.

Participate in Online Seminars

"Network with your fellow participants," says William Arruda, a career coach in New York City. "Seminars are a great way to network with people anywhere in the world who are interested in your topic."

Cast a Wide Net

To locate valuable lost acquaintances who don't show up elsewhere, try Google, Superpages' national people pages and other search engines.

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Craft Email Subject Lines Carefully

When you send unsolicited email to a networking target who doesn't know you by name, your message will have to elbow its way through a sea of Spam. In your subject line, mention:

- The name of a mutual acquaintance
- A very specific topic of interest to your target
- Make it snappy!

Generic subject lines, like "Request for help," or coy notes, like "I know someone you know," will just get you trashed.

Give Something Back

After you ask networking contacts to do something for you, do something for them. And whenever you can, offer even modest help to anyone in your broad network. "Confidently know that something will come back to you," says Diane Darling, author of **"The Networking Survival Guide"**.

Five Ways to Stay Safe While Networking

Don't Give Yourself Away

Keep personal data, especially identifying information, to yourself until you have reason to trust your correspondent. "One of the freaky things about online relationships is that you can overexpose yourself," says Darling. On the Web, one piece of information, whether name or address or phone number, let's your genie out of the bottle. Also be careful about disseminating documents, like your resume, where your identity is embedded.

Set Up a Safe E-mail Address

Consider establishing a separate email account for professional networking. Choose an email alias entirely unrelated to your real identity, and be sure the e-mail service doesn't allow anyone to retrieve information you may have provided, like what you entered in a registration form.

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Watch What You Say

What you write in an online forum may be retrievable by search engines for years. You can imperil your good name and even lose your shirt by recklessly trashing an associate, boss or employer. Get a voodoo doll and some sharp pins instead.

Safety in Numbers

Be wary of face-to-face encounters with people you've only known online. "If you meet people in a group, a public place is pretty low-risk," says Johnston.

Infect Others with Good Ideas, Not Viruses

The only thing more destructive to your reputation than spamming the world with your resume is allowing a PC virus or worm to send itself to everyone in your address book. Install anti-virus software and keep your subscription current.

For more information on how to stay safe in your job search, visit Monster's Security Center at:

<http://my.monster.com/securitycenter>

You can also check out many types of online fraud at:

www.lookstoogoodtobetrue.com/fraud.aspx