

Networking Tips for Techies

By Allan Hoffman, Monster Tech Jobs Expert

You've gotten the same advice again and again: If you're out of work, you've got to network.

Techies, like everyone else, often land jobs through colleagues, friends and other acquaintances. But how do you cultivate connections if you believe what you know -- rather than whom you know -- should determine whether you're hired?

For starters, you have to acknowledge just how essential connections can be to a job search. Consider the job histories of people around you as well as your own, and recognize how often technology professionals find jobs through people they know. Connections are especially important during economic doldrums, when employers are flooded with resumes and you need to stand out from the pack.

Decide to become a pro at networking, just like you're a pro at Unix or C++!

"Networking is about building relationships, and it takes time to do it," says Patti Wilson, owner of The Career Company, a career management firm in Silicon Valley. "You've got to try all avenues. You network through industries, you network socially and you network with colleagues. It's never-ending."

Get started by following these hands-on tips:

Team Up

Form a study group or success team, a group of four to eight people working together on a weekly basis to:

- Motivate each other
- Build contacts
- Generate job leads
- Think through career decisions

You can build a team with former work colleagues, school classmates and acquaintances from special-interest groups (SIGs) or by contacting a local career center.

Success teams, an idea derived from Barbara Sher's book "**Wishcraft: How to Get What You Really Want**", can help members establish goals for networking, such as identifying five new contacts over the course of a week.

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"It's been really good for moral support," says Wendy Desmonde of Menlo Park, California, of her participation in success teams.

E-Mail

You shouldn't spend all of your professional networking efforts in front of a screen, but e-mail lists can be one way to jump-start the process. Wilson facilitated an e-mail list called the Wednesday Job Group for networking and support. It has since expanded into the WednesdayNetwork blog, which she describes as "an online billboard for the group's talent."

[see: <http://pattiwilson.typepad.com/wednesdaynetwork>]

Desmonde, for instance, has used the WednesdayJobGroup list, along with another run by her local synagogue, to make contacts.

"It's a way of meeting other people with common interests, where there's a way to exchange job leads and career information," she says.

David Claiborne of San Francisco, former Manager of Client Services for e-mail marketing at now-shuttered Netcentives, recommends sending an email to everyone you know.

"Friends, relatives, aunts and uncles. Tell them all about your situation."

For Claiborne, one of those e-mails led to a connection with a Chief Operating Officer at a startup. The company doesn't have a current opening, but the contact may help to generate other leads.

Non Techie Groups

Think beyond your area of expertise.

- Churches
- Alumni groups
- Sports related clubs and other groups organized around interests, like mountain biking and macramé

can generate contacts for your job search.

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Such groups have a distinct advantage: They're not dominated by other techies looking for work. To be successful, realize that you shouldn't focus too intently on generating immediate leads for job openings. Remember, networking is about building relationships.

"One of the things I personally find kind of fun about networking is the scavenger hunt aspect of it," says Desmonde, who worked in software QA. "You don't know where it's going to lead, but meantime you're making contact with other people."

Informational Interviews

An informational interview with a company manager, or even a peer, has several goals:

- Gathering information about the firm
- Garnering advice and developing a relationship

Don't be shy about requesting a short amount of someone's time. Many people, says Paul Greenblatt, a career counselor at the Career Action Center in Cupertino, California, see a 20-minute informational interview as "...a really inexpensive way to give back" to their field by helping someone else.

If you're nervous about the process, try it with a friend or former colleague first. "It's really hard to get started," Greenblatt acknowledges. "Start your show off-Broadway."

Remember, this person is doing you a favor. Don't go into the interview with direct questions like, "Do you have a job for me?" You're not interviewing for a specific job. "You're gathering information, and at the same time, you're building a relationship," Greenblatt says.