

Social Netiquette: Mind Your Manners

Social networking web sites are becoming an indispensable part of the job search!

As your relationships move online, it's easy to track and manage your contacts and connections. Unfortunately, it's also easy to forget your social skills. Ignoring a contact's "hello" feels less harsh when it's done from 3,000 miles away. Sharing a racy joke with the group seems harmless when it's done on your mobile phone between interviews. But snubs still sting, and tawdry remains tactless.

According to social-networking experts, everything you need to succeed in the medium, you learned in kindergarten.

"They're the same social rules as anywhere else," said Lindsay Olson, a partner and recruiter at Paradigm Staffing, who uses social networking to identify potential recruits and vet candidates once their names have come up. "There's a very thin line between keeping in touch and blatant self promotion. Stepping over that line will really turn people off."

Make Friends And Earn Favors

The key is to keep the other person in mind and go out of your way to be both polite and helpful – before you need help yourself, said Paul Gillin, a social-networking consultant at Paul Gillin Communications and author of "The New Influencers" and "Secrets of Social Media Marketing."

"The etiquette is that you help people out and then when you need it, they help you out in return," Gillin said.

The social-networking site LinkedIn provides built-in ways for people to contribute. Members can submit questions to the group, plead for jobs, post openings at their company and recommend a friend or colleague. Providing answers, resources or tips; passing along a resume; or making an introduction can build social equity, Gillin said.

Be Useful, Not Pleading

Twitter is a micro blogging site that allows users to post brief (140-character) messages that can be read by members in their network, called "followers." Some use Twitter messages, called "Tweets," to broadcast their location or status on a project, or just to say "hello" to a friend. Resourceful job seekers have made Twitter part of their self-promotion engine. But be sure not to inundate followers with a constant stream of boasts, Olson said. Blatant self promotion or begging for work will turn off your audience

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If you're using a site like Twitter or Facebook to promote yourself, make sure you slip in your sales pitch between useful information like articles from trade publications, white papers on your industry and helpful advice.

Don't Be Shy; Don't Be Pushy

Don't hesitate to ask for introductions to another's contact or circle and expect to do the same, said Gillin. It feels like trading, but it's networking, he said.

"There's nothing wrong with asking people to write a recommendation; it's a normal business request," he said. "It's a give-to-get situation. Often when you write a recommendation, even unsolicited, you'll get one in return.

" But don't shake down your contacts, said Isabel Walcott Hilborn, owner of Strategic Internet Consulting and founder of SmartGirl.com, a 200,000-member social network for teenage girls. "People are nice. They usually are happy to help if it's a genuine request and not just spam or self promotion."

Don't Be A Creep

Consider the creep factor when calling someone you've researched online or through social networks, Gillin said.

"If someone contacted you out of thin air and had all this information about you that you didn't know was out there, that might creep you out," Gillin said. "The way to get around that is to be open with who you are and where you got the information. Say, 'ZoomInfo said you used to work at this company while I was there too, and I was hoping to make a connection.' "

"Adopt a professional manner; it's a business contact, and you're reaching out in a business sense," he said. "Don't make it overly personal. That eliminates a lot of the creep factor."

Be Active

A public profile can put you on someone's radar or keep you there, Olson said. Whether you submitted your resume cold or you were in for an interview, a connection on a social network and frequent activity can keep your name in a recruiter or contact's ear. "People aren't going to remember me because I made one recruiting call to them five years ago," Olson said, "but if they see me posting things all the time, they're going to know who I am when I call."

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Behave

As any number of college students and one Miss America contestant can tell you, it's bad form to record your indiscretions and post the evidence on a public Web site. Embarrassing photos or remarks can surface during your job search. Recruiters and hiring managers routinely search social-networking sites for background information, and many will hold photos of youthful hi-jinks against them.

Get Googled; Get Found

Web developers don't rely on luck to drive readers to their Web site. They use search engine optimization (SEO) to increase the likelihood search engines will showcase their Web pages. Your profiles on LinkedIn and other social networks should be no different. Make sure recruiters can find you.

SEO relies on the concept that the more prominently a Web page appears in search results, the more searchers will visit the page. Optimizing your profile pushes it toward the top.

SEO marketers (a budding job classification) add keywords, which are the terms that are most likely to be queried by a Web searcher interested in the topic you are trying to promote -- in this case, your career. If you want to be noticed by anyone who needs a Database Administrator with MySQL experience, your profile should use include those specific terms, instead of more generic or less descriptive terms like "DBA" or "database admin" and any specific languages or skills the recruiter might search for.

Choosing the right network for your profile can also help. While Facebook might be a larger, more useful network for your profession, LinkedIn is particularly well positioned for Google searches.

Promote Your Ambitions, Not Your Past

Now that you've finished optimizing your profile for search, make sure it matches what you want to do, not just what you've done, Olson said. Choose words that match your aspirations, not just your history.

"If I were a digital-marketing person and I wanted to move into an SEO job, I'd put it in as an area of interest or whatever," she said, "as long as I got those key words into the text so I could be found on those searches."

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Don't Just Use One Network

LinkedIn may be the most widely known and used social network purely for business contacts. However it isn't right for everyone or every situation. You may run into situations where you identify a company or individual you need to contact and use other searches to find e-mail addresses, phone numbers or other information to get you closer to that contact. ZoomInfo, Spock and other business-information aggregation sites are great places to gather information about your target companies or hiring managers.

Finish The Job

The biggest mistake most people make using LinkedIn, Facebook and social networks is that they don't complete their profiles with all the information about their experience, skills and miscellaneous information that could be relevant; what's more, they don't pursue contacts, said Shally Steckerl, a recruiting consultant and founder of Jobmachine.com. Omitting information makes it difficult for recruiters to find your profile and hard for your network to connect you to new opportunities through mutual contacts.

Follow Through

Your network doesn't build itself. You have to take advantage of the opportunities to expand your reach. When you meet someone at an event or on the phone, ask if they mind if you link to them, then do it.

"It's exactly like real life, like a virtual water cooler where you talk to your friends or co-workers," Hilborn said. "If you're the kind of person who never needs anything – a job or a plumber or advice on how to raise your baby – go ahead and skip the whole social-networking thing. But if you ever need anything from anyone else, social networks can help you."

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