

Tips for Social Networking Online

By Allan Hoffman, Monster Tech Jobs Expert

Just when you've mastered the art of handing out your business card, along comes another way to make connections - social networking online.

Social networking sites help you make connections for business, dating or personal interests. Specifics vary, but they generally work as follows:

- A friend or contact invites you to join the service. You may also join by visiting the site and signing up on your own.
- You create a profile describing yourself and your interests.
- You connect to your friend's or colleague's network and then expand your own network via message boards, blogs and connecting to members with similar interests.

By joining via an invitation from someone you know, someone with interests similar to yours, you could easily be connected to a network of hundreds of people within seconds. An easy way to find job leads, right? Well, not so fast.

Avoid These Social Networking Gaffes

As you would expect, newfangled ways to network also mean plenty of chances for faux pas and breaches of etiquette. To help you navigate the new world of social networking, heed these seven tips:

1) Choose Your Flavor

Don't jump at every offer to join a social networking service. Some focus on dating, while others are devoted to professional interests. Many mix business and pleasure:

- One moment you may marvel at a newfound friend's taste in tunes
- Next you realize she works at the company of your dreams

But you probably don't want to devote your time making contacts with 20-something music fans when you're a 50 something sales exec with no interest in post ABBA bands.

(continued)

Tips for Social Networking Online

2) Understand Site Culture and Rules

Social networking sites can be like high school, with arcane social customs and rules. Before contacting the colleagues of the friend who invited you to the site, get to know the site's culture. A casual email introduction may suffice at one site but could peg you as gauche -- or worse -- at another.

3) Hone Your Profile

Even social networking spots devoted to fun over work can lead to career connections. Make sure your profile doesn't include anything you wouldn't want a potential boss to see. This is especially true if you are using a site primarily for professional purposes.

Potential employers may find your online profile and make judgment calls based on what they find. Keep this in mind and tailor your profiles based on what you would want potential employers to see.

4) Don't Be Pushy

Many members of social networking groups have had bad experiences with pushy types. "Be sensitive to individuals' networks," says Jenna Gausman, a career counselor with Kerwin and Associates.

"Do not be overly aggressive in trying to "Get in" with someone's network. Someone who is too persistent can be annoying and actually will damage their own reputation if they try too hard."

5) Do What You Say You Will

To preserve your reputation, keep your promises when offering to facilitate a personal introduction or find a phone number. "You must follow through," says Gausman. And if you express interest in another individual's help, be sure to follow up on the person's assistance.

"They are giving up a piece of their network, and their reputation is now on the line, so to speak," Gausman says. "At least reach out to that person."

6) Prepare for Face-to-Face Introductions

Just because your network is developed online doesn't mean relationships stay there. Social networking sites often connect people offline through individual meetings or group events. Just remember, a face-to-face meeting requires you to respond without the time afforded by e-mail to craft your message.

(continued)

Tips for Social Networking Online

Know what you want from a meeting. Career coach Lynn Berger recommends a brief, prepared introduction for group events. "This way, the individual does not fumble around and miss the opportunity to make a good impression," she says.

7) Help Yourself by Helping Others

Networking is reciprocal, so do unto others as you'd want done to you.

If you're able to help people, they'll be more likely to remember you and return the favor!

(End)