**Pumping up your Professional Network**

Hosted by Beth Kanter (October 2008), <http://www.socialedge.org/discussions/marketing-communication/pumping-up-your-professional-network>

**Using Online Social Networking Tools Effectively**

Professional networking --meeting and connecting with people who can help you get things done-- is an indispensable skill for social entrepreneurs. Using online social networks like [Facebook](http://www.facebook.com), [LinkedIn](http://www.linkedin.com), and even [Twitter](http://www.twitter.com) can help you reach your networking goals.

But they are just tools. The secret sauce is relationship building, and here’s the recipe:
 **1. Meet people as people first.**

I borrowed this phrase from Connie Bensen, a social media guru who writes about [networking 101](http://conniebensen.com/blog/2007/11/16/effective-networking-101/).

It is the quality of the relationships that you build online that really matters, not just how many people you meet.

Business relationships, like fine wine, mature over time, from first encounter to trusted colleague. Read Rachel Happe’s “[Relationship Development is a process, sometimes tools can help](http://www.thesocialorganization.com/2008/02/creating-intima.html)”

**2. Reciprocity is important -- It isn't always gimme, gimme, gimme**

Don’t always ask people to help you or give you something every time you interact with them. And please don’t make that your first point of contact with someone you have just met. That’s a huge turn off.

It’s important to be helpful, share resources and connect people to other people. Social networks, like Facebook and Twitter, let you glean a lot of information about what your friends are up to or might need. Set aside some time to check status lines and think about how you may be helpful to them, not the other way around.

It’s like putting money in the bank for a rainy day. You will be surprised in the many ways approaching your network this way will reward you.  Marnie Webb has written about this in her post “[Networking Your Networked Network](http://ext337.org/article/networking-your-networked-network)”

**3. Interweave and connect with others within your network and keep connected**

Uplift people in your network when they need it and they will do so back. Take every opportunity to keep connected to people in your network. It is like tending a garden.

I schedule time each week to tend to my network. It is part of my daily routine –5 to 10 minutes per day. I also try to take special care to follow up after I’ve met someone at a conference where the connection really resonated. Here’s some wonderful [conference networking hacks](http://www.lifehack.org/articles/lifehack/post-conference-follow-up-hacks.html) from Chris Brogan.

[Liz Strauss](http://www.successful-blog.com/) says: “Meet your friends by noticing people who have ideas that intrigue you and begin by asking them to elaborate on what they said.”  June Holley’s [Network Weaving Checklist](http://www.networkweaving.com/june_files/NetworkWeaverChecklist2.pdf) can help you think about how to approach this interweaving in a structured way.

Check also Bob Allare’s “[Care and Feeding of Your Network](http://www.changethis.com/21.CareFeedingOfNetwork)” for maintenance tips.

**4. Make time to meet new people each week**

No matter how busy I am, I try to connect with new people each week. I also get lots of new ideas by connecting with people who are outside my main industry or topic area. Life can get boring if you get stuck in a silo or only interact with people who think just like you or cover the same topics. Be a renaissance, cross-disciplinary networker. Think creatively about the new types of people and connections you want to make. Think outside your subject matter area.

**5. Build your network before you need it**

There are many reasons why it is important to invest in your network [before you need it](http://www.web-strategist.com/blog/2008/06/12/build-your-network-before-you-need-them/).  As you’ve probably gathered from reading the other tips, building a vibrant professional network is time consuming. People don’t easily trust people who come asking.

**6. Invest in yourself first**

I like to share what I know with other people, but before I can do that I need to keep investing in my learning. For me, that translates to carving out time for my professional reading and blogging everyday. And the great thing about [having a blog](http://beth.typepad.com), is that it is a really extraordinary networking tool!

**QUESTIONS:**
- What works for you?
- Do you have any advice about using online networking tools?
- What type of expertise or connections have you found through networking?
- What kind of connections has proven more difficult to make?