

Retro-Networking™

Retro-Networking™ Goes Social

By Vicky Oliver

Social networking is a great way to meet new colleagues, clients, and customers. But there's another way: retro-networking™. Retro-networking is all about finding new and interesting ways to forge professional connections with people face-to-face — people who can further your career or business. And because retro-networking doesn't get as much buzz as social networking does, it's actually surprisingly effective. However, when you combine retro-networking with social networking, you're optimizing your ability to win new friends in high places. Here are five ways to do it.

If the prospect of in-person networking makes you break out in hives, you may want to start connecting with your work chums online first. Just realize that many online interactions will eventually lead to in-person networking opportunities. Here are some of the tricks of the Twitterati.

1. Find one avenue of social media that you really enjoy, and excel at it. Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and Instagram all have their special place — in different people's hearts. Don't worry so much if you spark to one and don't enjoy the others quite as much. It's better to be really adept at one form of social media than fair to middling at all of them. Think about whom you are trying to reach. If it's mainly friends, maybe Facebook is your social medium of choice. If you're trying to build a giant network quickly, maybe you're more of a Twitter person.

2. Don't be a one-trick pony. With all of the online buzz about "branding yourself" this may sound counter-intuitive but you don't want to always, relentlessly post about the exact same thing. It gets boring, and you will lose followers. Social networking is where business and personal collide. Even if you want to focus the majority of your posts on your product or company, some of the time you should mix it up with other content. Your followers will realize that you're not just the voice of your brand; you're a real, live person, too.

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3. Link up from LinkedIn. If you have your name appear as "Anonymous" on LinkedIn, you can't tell who's reading your profile. That's a lost opportunity. Instead, set your profile so that your name will show up when you look up people. This allows others to see when you've read their profiles, and also lets you know who's looked you up. If you have a repeat visitor, view it as a professional compliment and consider getting in touch with him or her. The invitation to meet face-to-face is a meaningful gesture that can generate a new professional contact.

4. Master your Widgets and Privacy Controls. With the press of a button, it's possible to create one post and upload it onto Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn simultaneously. For some posts, that may be appropriate, and it's certainly efficient! But other posts may be more targeted to a particular group. If so, remember: one post does not fit all. Some posts you may not wish to be read widely. If that's the case, remember to adjust your privacy controls.

5. Realize that social media are tools. For most people, online is a networking tool, not an end in itself. With social media, you now have the tools to elevate your networking game. The gatekeepers that used to keep people out have mostly disappeared, and through Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and other social media sites you now have access to anyone. When you make a connection that works for you, try to see if maybe you can find synergies by meeting in person.

Used properly, social media should lead to more in-person exchanges and business opportunities. Try to be patient as you experiment with these different social media tools. The learning curve can be surprisingly steep, and it's probably not possible to master everything you can learn in just one day. Start slow. Set up an online profile, knowing you can always change it later. And then start posting. Hopefully you'll find an area of social networking that engages you as well as others.

Vicky Oliver is the author of five best-selling career development books:
301 Smart Answers To Tough Interview Questions; The Millionaire's Handbook;
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