

# Online Networking for Professionals

If you are anything like me and blinked at all this decade, the Internet has gotten away from us. Massive changes, most frequently called Web 2.0, as in a totally new iteration of what was before, has taken place in our sleep. One of the best explanations of this and what it means to all of us resides at the computer publisher O'Reilly at this address.

<http://www.oreillynet.com/pub/a/oreilly/tim/news/2005/09/30/what-is-web-20.html>

This site also maintains a list of web sites it considers to be Web 2.0.

<http://www.web2list.com/?menu=all>.

Web 2.0 presents many new opportunities for networking on the Internet. The classic definition of networking, with colleagues and family and friends is still important. But the old adage, tell everyone you know you are looking for a job, takes on new meaning in this new world. In a word, Web 2.0 is all about **interaction** in as many ways as one can imagine. Users and consumers of all sorts of things from news to entertainment are taking matters into their own hands and sounding off and sharing their opinions with fellow users. Many feel compelled, just as we do, to share their knowledge and expertise to help others. This is exactly the kind of environment job seekers need.

Internet networking for professionals is not your teenager's MySpace. It is social networking, but the sites I am talking about have as their main goal to help people find jobs, move up, create relationships, and keep up with their particular industries. This area of the web does not have permanently clear winners in the space. These sites have not been around as long as Yahoo or Google and dominance is still being hard fought. There is still time and space for someone to come along and do it better. But at the moment, there are clear winners and losers. Business Week just did a bevy of articles on the phenomena which you can find here.

[http://www.businessweek.com/technology/content/sep2006/tc20060911\\_414136.htm?chan=technology\\_ceo+guide+to+technology\\_social+networks](http://www.businessweek.com/technology/content/sep2006/tc20060911_414136.htm?chan=technology_ceo+guide+to+technology_social+networks).

Business Week lists many corporations and high-end recruiters that are using these sites to find job candidates. Jane Black in "The Perils and Promise of Online Smoozing" states that "social networking sites have attracted more than \$40 million in venture-capital money since last fall." When asked why this model works Steve Rosenbush in "How LinkedIn Broke Through" answers "People who have been working for at least 10 years have a network. It doesn't come from networking; it just comes automatically, from going to work. But people tend to lose touch."

This area is currently one of the fastest changing categories represented in cyberspace. Quintessential Careers wrote a good article on the trend which you can access at [http://www.quintcareers.com/maximizing\\_online\\_networking.html](http://www.quintcareers.com/maximizing_online_networking.html). Some of the sites mentioned in that article appear to be dead, most notably Fast Company's COF or Company of Friends. Other sites such as Ryse and Ecademy are difficult to use and require that you know the email addresses of past friends and colleagues before you can even see if they use the site. Ecademy users appear to be mostly outside the US, and the site only has a 14 day free trial while most of the others have free models. Networking at

Ryze appears to be limited to interacting over subject specific forums or groups. Monster's networking area seems to me to be the most limited with few participants.

The Quintessential Careers article is somewhat negative, but it points out a concept that divides many networkers. What methods are ethical when meeting new people and when does requesting to network become nothing more than spam? The following site makes it easy to find new people to meet through the people that you already know and I personally think that is the safe way to go.

The clear leader with over 6 million members is LinkedIn. ([www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com)) The key here is a complete profile full of key-word rich subject matter. Also if you use a nickname like I do, introduce yourself as Florene (Flo) Williams so that people can find you both ways. You also need to provide information about all the college and universities you have attended. Once you do, you can search for past coworkers or friends with one click. Anyone who has joined LinkedIn that indicates in their profile working at one of your past companies, or attending one of your universities during the time frame that you were there, will pop up as soon as you do a search. If you know the person, you send a request to become a part of their network.

I signed up with LinkedIn when they first started, but it was still hard to use, so I came back to it several months later. At that time no one at any of my past positions had signed up with LinkedIn. But two friends from my undergraduate days were listed. Luckily for me, they both have become very successful. One is now a senior V.P. for a major financial institution, and the other created and maintains a web site for DBA's, or database administrators, and just started doing training for another highly placed financial institution. In just a few months with just those two contacts, my network within three degrees of me grew to over 5200 people. You can contact someone directly if they are only two degrees from you, if three degrees away you need to have your contact negotiate an introduction for you.

What is the advantage to professionals to be a part of this networking site? One of my friends told me he used the site to get his support network aligned before he quit his local job and went out on his own. For others it is the most convenient way to keep in touch with a widely based network of friends with constantly updated particulars such as new jobs, new contact information etc. Many of the LinkedIn people talk about the comfort of finding new employees through recommendations from people they trust and respect. I have an interest in working for a particular university and have been able to email people who have worked there or attended classes there to find out what is not always available through research--what is the culture like? People have been very kind to answer my questions even though I am a total stranger.

One of the secrets I have discovered about LinkedIn is that joining as many groups as you can facilitates reaching out to more people because members of groups can contact each other regardless of how many degrees separation between them. The types of groups represented include academic alumni organizations, corporate groups, conferences, networking groups, philanthropic non-profits, and professional organizations. The first

three groups, if you fit the criteria, you are automatically accepted as a member. The last few require a petition as to why you want to join that group and group leaders have to accept that request. I have not had a request to join a group turned down yet. LinkedIn has recently created a directory for groups which you can find on the site, and you can also start your own.

There are many web sites that talk about LinkedIn and offer tips as to how to get more value out of using the site. Most of them now can be found at the My Link Wiki for LinkedIn at <http://linkedin.pbwiki.com/FrontPage> along with its sister site My Link Pro at <http://mylinkpro.com>. Along the way I helped myself to free ebooks and other links of interest offered by networkers. Karen Hansen of Quintessential Careers quotes Thomas Powers who wrote a book on site Ecademy as saying, “until the perfect online networking site comes along, the persistence to uncover the tricks and shortcuts -- or the resourcefulness to deploy the tips mined by others -- can be a great boon to job-seekers and others seeking to expand their professional networks.”