

What is E-Networking?

Traditional networking teaches you to build a primary contact list, which you use to identify additional names and contacts. The process repeats itself until you create an upside down pyramid, believing that the "hidden" job market holds the best opportunities, if only you can network your way into them.

E-Networking combines the traditional networking you do as part of your career search, with the power of the Internet. It allows you to create a community of virtual contacts who can provide critical information on job leads, industry trends and possible openings. These are people whom you would never have met in any other way.

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The Three Keys of Successful E-Networking

Reproducing this critical career search strategy on the Internet can dramatically expand your circle of contacts and help locate that next great opportunity even faster. In order to achieve the best results, it is essential to answer three basic questions before you begin:

What is the advantage of E-Networking?

Many people feel awkward with the concept of networking. They are reluctant to pick up the phone and call a stranger, even if there has been a personal recommendation from a mutual friend. The dialogues feel forced, strained and artificial. Some people are very comfortable doing this, but for many, it is the most dreadful and difficult part of the job search process. On-line interactions, however, do not involve a phone call or necessitate a personal meeting, thereby eliminating most of the fear surrounding that first "encounter". When you feel more comfortable networking, you will do more of it, thereby generating new leads on a continual basis from a growing circle of contacts.

Where do I go for E-Networking?

There are many sites devoted to business networking, and other sites that have strong networking components. Professional associations, alumni organizations, message boards and other on-line communities are all places that you should visit with E-Networking in mind. The same is true for ISPs and browsers, which often host career clubs segmented by industry or area of expertise. Always investigate the links of sites you visit to see what other places you should visit for E-Networking leads.

How do I network on line?

When you identify an E-Networking prospect, you should use an email template that you have developed for your job search. The template would include how you found that

person (e.g., both members of the same networking web site, both alumni of the same university, referred by another virtual contact, etc.), what your common areas of interest are (e.g. both worked for a specific company, experience in the same field, a shared goal, etc.), and a request for further information (e.g. information about a particular industry, advice about an objective, etc.). It is also a good idea to personalize your template with something about yourself that you feel comfortable sharing - it helps create a mutual bond and makes the recipient more at ease.

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Critical Insights into E-Networking

There are some differences between traditional networking and E-Networking. These include:

E-Networking does not require an introduction from a primary contact on your networking list. The person on-line is the primary contact and can also refer you to others.

E-Networking gets immediate responses. There is no telephone tag to be played on-line. People who are email fluent check their email frequently, and tend to respond within 48 hours to an inquiry. Someone who is not interested in E-Networking simply won't respond at all.

Everyone on the Internet is accessible to you. The publication of their email address means that you have an opportunity to initiate contact and build a relationship. That sort of availability simply doesn't exist in traditional networking.

Managing your circle of contacts is greatly simplified. You can use contact lists that are internal to many sites, or your own electronic address book to manage your growing circle of E-Networking contacts. There is no need to collect numerous business cards with hastily scrawled reminders about each individual.

Many sites sponsor networking circles and events. Some of the best E-Networking sites are traveling throughout the country, hosting presentations and seminars for their members. The assumption is that you have met colleagues virtually, and now want to cement those relationships at an evening dedicated to further networking and perhaps even professional development.

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E-Networking Etiquette

It is important to remember certain "rules of the road" when you begin your E-Networking efforts:

Initiate widely; continue selectively. It is important to cast a wide net when you are networking on the web, simply because you do not have a personal introduction to pave the way for you. Sometimes it is difficult to tell, by the information that is first available to you, if someone will be useful as a networking partner. So do make your initial efforts large, and then scale back.

Identify yourself and use common sense. You are in this for a purely business reason - to augment your job search efforts. Therefore do not use an alias or any other pretense that would make someone uncomfortable networking with you. People who are also networking for business will recognize that and respond accordingly.

Follow standard business courtesy. Email sometimes lulls us into being more casual with strangers than we would normally be. Please remember this is business, and it is your job search. Therefore, it is important to strike a tone somewhere in between a formal business letter and a casual note to a good friend. Make your communications friendly but respectful. Do not use any acronyms or commonly used symbols (e.g. lol, J, L, etc.) in any of your business correspondence.

Bookmark, or select favorites, early and often. When you are searching for that next great site, it is all too easy to get lost. It is essential, therefore, that you bookmark favorite sites immediately and make a habit out of frequently editing your selections. That way you are never hunting for that wonderful link you discovered at two a.m. the night before.

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E-Networking Sites

You will also want to review our list of [Networking & Support Groups](#), including the [Networking Websites](#).

Profile-Driven Sites

These are sites that ask you to create, and maintain, an individual profile about your experience and background. The site then allows you to search for other members who share your common interests. Membership, which is mandatory, is absolutely free.

[Yahoo! Groups](#) *formerly eGroups*

Yahoo! Groups is a free email group service that allows you to easily create and join email groups. Email groups offer a convenient way to connect with others who share the same interests and ideas. Their business and finance area is an especially powerful place to go to meet other E-Networkers.

Sites with an Individual Focus

There are hundreds of sites that offer advice and counsel to the independent contractor. But free-lance professionals are often your best source of information regarding industry trends and opportunities. That makes them perfect partners to network with, since they are want to know whom is hiring and who is growing

[Fast Company Groups Directory](#)

Fast Company magazine's global readers' network of self-organizing local discussion groups, mentoring and networking organizations. You can meet the people associated with the cell in your area and as a member of the readers' network, you can build your own personal profile online. Use your digital business card to network with other group members in your area -- and to find people with whom you can connect, communicate, and collaborate.

[Guru.com](#)

Guru.com is a San Francisco-based startup dedicated to empower independent professionals and the clients who hire them. You can search their data base of gurus by geographic region and industry specialty, finding out work history, experience and other background information to locate potential E-Networkers.