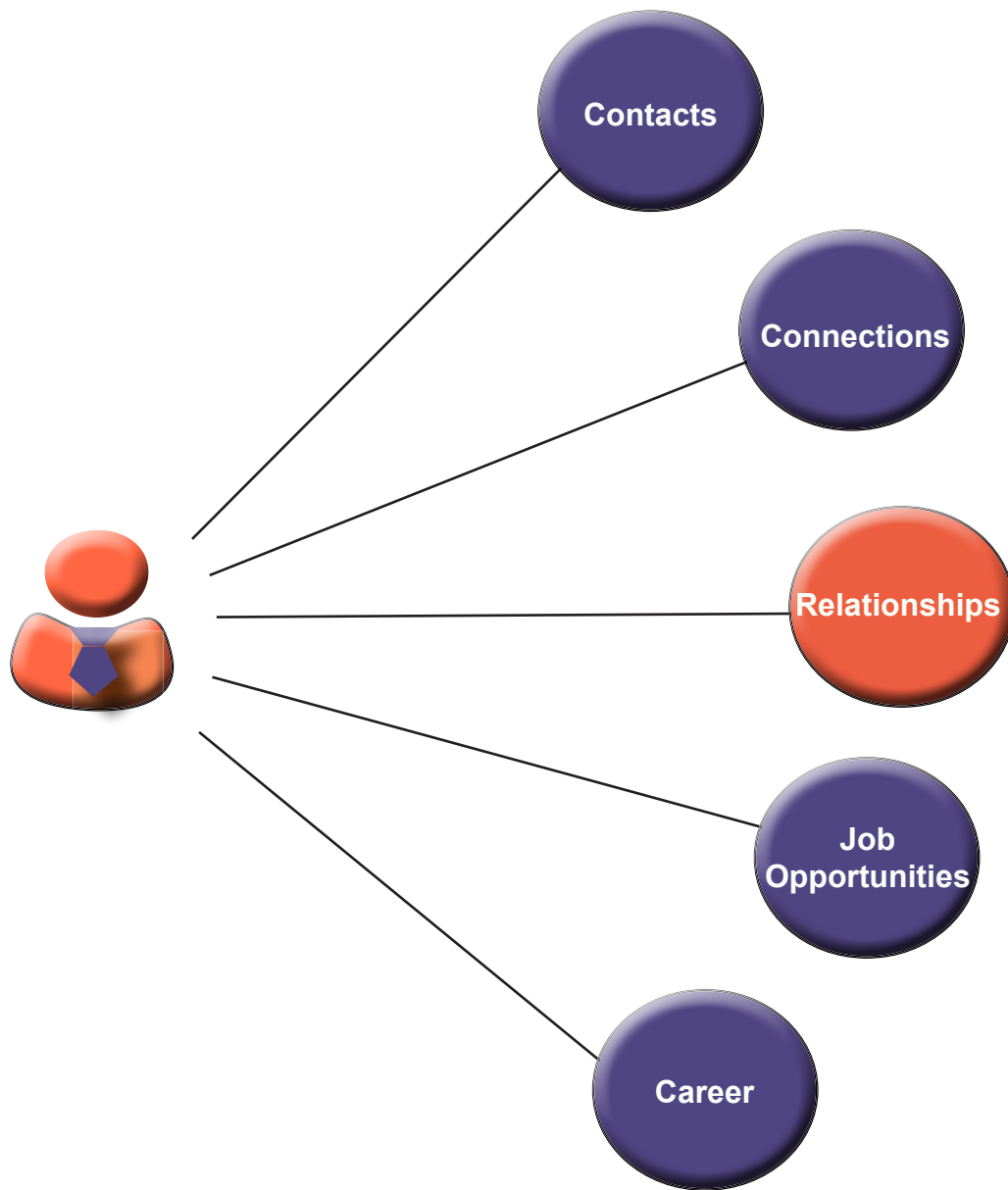


Professional Networking

A Valuable Job Search Tool For College Students



Melissa Camacho
NYC College of Technology
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Introduction

What is Professional Networking?

Professional Networking is a tool to build a professional network where you make connections with people to help you find job opportunities and provide you with the benefits of advancement in your career. (Mckay, 2016) It is building relationships with people whom you share common goals and interests; it becomes a valuable job search tool if you learn how to network professionally.

Once your network expands overtime, the people you develop relationships with will help you learn about where you are and open the doors of opportunity for the future. Your network is people you encounter such as your colleagues, friends, family, professors, your managers, and acquaintances.

Most importantly, you will be up-to-date with what companies are expecting from their employees and “stay on the cutting edge of technology and new business trends.” (Lotich, 2014) In addition, you will be aware of the skills you can enhance as an aspiring professional. You will have the necessary resources to become a competitive candidate in the modern job market.

Time To Get Started

You are already at the beginning of your college years and you are at the level of a whole new experience in your academic and social life. It is time to take the opportunity to be invested in the field you are interested in pursuing. This does not just entail being successful in your studies and activities, but to start getting your foot in the doors of job and career opportunities.

Think Like A ‘Professional’

First, you should think of the resources you need to get ahead in the industry you are interested in working for and where you decide to have a long successful career. Apart from just updating your resume, applying for jobs, and waiting to be called for an interview, you need to search for guidance from people who can help you along the job search process.

Don’t be Shy. Remember, this is about using professional networking as an effective tool to help you land the job you want, but it also takes persistence, eagerness, initiative, and flexibility as a college student to accomplish that goal.

Professional Networking Resources

Get to Know Your Peers

In order to build your network, you need to be resourceful. To accomplish this goal, you need to start interacting with people on a professional and social level. This includes people you encounter academically such as students and professors in class, libraries, activities, and those you encounter professionally such as the people at your job or your internship. According to Hansen (2017), here are examples of ways you can begin establishing a network that will prepare you to launch a successful job search strategy for your career:

- ☑ **Meet with Students:** You can encounter many students of diverse opportunities, backgrounds, and interests by participating in student activities such as student clubs, fraternities, sororities, and organizations.
- ☑ **Gather Information:** When you meet with students, get as much information as you can about your field of interests. The reason why this is important is because it can be retrievable once you graduate from college. You can use it as advice and helpful tips as you begin your career path.

Furthermore, you can get advice from people who have expert knowledge about the job market and other career growing strategies such as professors. You may find professors who have a lot of experience in the career you are interested in and help pave the way by providing instructions to build your networking strategies. (Delgado, 2014)

Exchange Information

Start by creating and printing your own business card in addition to collecting contact information from people within your network. Your business card is a networking tool that represents who you are either as a student, intern, a member or employee of an organization; it needs to be in a simple formatting style with information such as your name, address, phone numbers, e-mails, and school name. (Thomas, 2012) You should carry a set of business cards to job fairs, when you meet with representatives from various companies, and other career events in case a company representative or a manager requests your business card.

Social Networking Sites

It is not just a matter of who you need to network with, but also what will you use to create your network. Making contacts and developing a relationship with your peers is only half the process. The rise of technology in the creation of social media sites has set a new trend in the role of professional networking. According to Nikolaou (2014), "These SNW allow users to "present themselves" and network in various ways." (p.179). There are top social networking sites that are heavily used to network for job search purposes.

LinkedIn

Let's begin with the most recognizable social media site for professional networking, LinkedIn. In the new age of technology, it is crucial for college students to create a LinkedIn profile due to the fact that it shows parts of their personality and qualities that are not revealed on their resume. (Friedman, 2013)

This means you need to know how to present yourself while networking online. While your resume describes your skills and accomplishments, the way you communicate with others on a professional level will also determine how you fit into the culture of job industries today. However, it is a strategy that develops once you become accustomed to being open to your network in sharing what your interests and goals are. If you don't put these skills to practice, you will not be able to market yourself as the ideal professional many companies are looking forward to 'hire.'

When networking on LinkedIn, you need to take the necessary steps to market yourself as a professional. Below are a list of some helpful networking tips you can use. According to Griffin (2014), there are some basic LinkedIn steps college students should follow and adapt to:

- 1. Participate:** It is no use to just create a LinkedIn profile without any content; it will leave your page unnoticeable, which is what you want to avoid. Post blogs that are **professional** such as current news and events that are job industry related. Don't forget to comment on posts from people you know within your network.
- 2. Write Professionally:** When posting on LinkedIn, make sure you are using complete sentences and proper grammar not limited to correct punctuations. However, refrain from using slang and exclamation points.
- 3. Update Your Profile:** As you develop your professional skills throughout your career, it is crucial that you update your most recent job experiences and add any skills where you demonstrate proficiency, which is not limited to being a volunteer for an organization and any leadership roles you gain in school or at work.

4. **Add Courses:** If you don't have any job experiences as of yet, include any classes where you learned new skills in a field you are interested in or subjects that contribute to knowledge towards a job related area or areas pertaining to your major.
5. **Ask for Recommendations:** Last, but not least, employers are interested in knowing what kind of impression you leave on others. Don't hesitate to ask professors, internship coordinators, managers, and colleagues for references at the start of building your network.

Don't just show your professional skills, demonstrate how well you use them. While learning to master your self-presentation strategies, you should do research about the companies you are interested in working for. Schneiderman (2016) states: "Once you learn about a company or someone's professional outlook, share goals that are relevant to their work. Be open about other professional goals beyond their current position." This will help you know what questions to ask and figure out ways you can share your expertise and ideas in a particular area you have much experience in. Part of the job is to get companies to remember you and what your strengths are. This will increase your chances of getting called for a job interview and getting hired from those particular companies.

Facebook

Facebook, the largest social media networking site, has a professional networking feature that is useful for college students to share their interests and their motives known as Facebook Groups. Facebook Groups allow users to connect with other members by networking to share common goals and interests. (Epstein, 2009) In doing so, you can search for a company's Facebook page to demonstrate interest and feel free to engage in discussions that they can benefit from. Some companies do have preferences for posts on their Facebook Group pages. Make sure you follow their rules if you want to remain as a group member on their page and maintain a professional relationship.

Professional Networking Rules and Standards

What is Unprofessional Behavior in Networking?

Unprofessional behavior in networking includes any characteristic that is unethical and does not maintain a professional in person or online presence. According to college.usatoday.com, being unprofessional will ultimately have a bad impression on hiring managers, decrease your chances of getting hired, and have a negative impact on your job search process.

Why does Unprofessional Behavior decrease your chances of getting hired?

The reality is that there are more employers who want to know how the candidate will fit into the company's culture. For example, a survey asked employers the purpose for screening candidates on social media sites and about 51% are interested if the candidate fits culture of the work environment, which is more than the other 45% who are more interested in a candidate's qualifications. (Smith, 2013)

Know Your "Networking Manners"

Appropriate Style of Communication

Yes, just like when you are working at a job, there are networking habits you must consider in order to leave a positive impression on employers. Communication is a big factor that employers evaluate to see if you can properly understand the morale they use in the workplace. It combines your identity as a professional and the message you deliver to employers. According to Moore (2014), here are rules you should follow:

- 1. Introduce Yourself** - First, let the company know who you are. This is an essential standard rule when first communicating with an employer.
- 2. Give Out Business Cards Upon Request** - Don't push it. A company will let you know if they want your business card.
- 3. Don't Stalk the Employer** - There is a difference between researching information on a company's social media page or website to keep up with their current mission and events and constantly e-mailing or messaging them. That is a form of harassment. Keep in mind that when networking, you are still a guest and you are not necessarily doing business with them.
- 4. Don't Interrupt Others** - When you attend workshops, job fairs, and other job networking events, there will be other candidates and guests who will be just as anxious as you who want to inquire and ask a representative questions regarding the company he or she represents. Don't interfere or interrupt others when they are asking questions or conversing with that representative. You must be patient, considerate, and polite.

Social Media

In addition to using appropriate style of communication when encountering employers, there is a difference in the way you conduct yourself in your own personal social media account and your professional networking account. It all comes down to what your purpose is. When you are using your professional account, you must maintain your professional identity that entails connecting with others with the intention of sharing your goals, achievements, and inquiring about job opportunities; when networking on your personal account, you are mainly developing a relationship with people you connect with no matter what style of communication you use. (Sexton, 2014). In your personal social networking account, it is up to the other person you are connecting with to use his or her own personal judgement on the communication style you choose.

For example, you can send a message from Facebook messenger to your friend saying, "Hey, what's up?" In a professional network like LinkedIn, you should start a professional conversation by saying, "Good Morning, how have things been going today?" Below are useful tips you can use to distinguish how you communicate when using social networking sites for social and professional purposes:

- **Be aware** of who your audience is.
- **Think** about how they will react to your content.

Other ways college students can practice professionalism is by uploading professional profile pictures which can include family oriented profiles. (Hooker et al., 2011, p.3) Other types of professional profile pictures can be graduation pictures, awards, and merits.

Refrain from posting unprofessional content on social media such as drinking, hostility, and violent behavior. These categories will fall under *Faux Pas* postings. *Faux Pas* will have a negative effect on your chances of getting a job. (Alexander et al., 2016) Employers take the time to check and evaluate your profile information and background to see if you are the type of person who is going to relate well to other colleagues and employees. If you don't use caution when posting on social media and interacting with people within your network, you will decrease your chances of getting noticed from perspective employers.

Remember, these companies want to hire a candidate they can trust. They want to be certain that you can adhere to the rules and be respectful, in addition to meeting the requirements to be qualified for the job.

Conclusion

If you practice networking professionally, your job search strategies will develop and you will have better chances of getting the job you need. Keep in mind that professional networking is not primarily just to have a friendly relationship with others, but rather it is primarily using professional networking as a job search tool to create a road map of connections and crucial information that you can reference for the purpose of building job and career opportunities. It is not just a matter of doing it the right way, but the professional way. Don't just learn the steps to build your network, apply it. Don't just create your profile on a professional social networking site and say, "Hey, I did what I was advised to do; I created an account and all my information is there." There are questions you should answer to ensure that you are applying the proper rules and strategies to professional networking:

- 1. Did you make the right connections?**
- 2. Did you go through all the steps to network like a 'professional'?**
- 3. Did you use appropriate style of communication?**
- 4. Last, but not least, is your profile up-to-date with your skills, background, merits, and experience?**

The professional development and self-acknowledgement you gain in your college years will have you equipped to communicate with other companies by marketing yourself as a professional. As a result, you will be ready to walk into the first door to a long successful career.

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