

Have digital networks killed the need for face-to-face networking?

By [Tish Magongwa](#)

30 May 2016

In an age of professional social networks, it might seem as if the design of your CV and depth of your LinkedIn profile determines your ability to advance your career. In reality, networking is still an essential skill that should be fine-tuned and perfected.



Decision makers still value human contact. Your digital profile is still considered a 'cold call' by the people who matter – they want to know who you really are, beyond a one-dimensional summary. Although it is vital to play in the digital networking space, there is no substitute for face-to-face interaction. The perfect LinkedIn profile means nothing if you cannot win people over in person, even though the end goal is ultimately the same: to promote yourself and connect with the right people.

It is pointless to attend an event and blindly try to make an impact on everyone in the room. You have to know your short and long terms goals and align your networking strategy accordingly. Be strategic: before you attend an event, research who will be there and a little bit about them. Know who you want to chat to, and make it happen.

Listen first

The most vital skill in networking successfully is listening. Never approach a group of people and start running your mouth off because you feel you need to assert yourself and promote your skill set. Ask questions, listen and identify similar interests. Notice these interests and ask more questions about them. Be flexible – if they are not responding to you, change your agenda. Endearing yourself to someone as a person first makes it much easier to approach him or her professionally later. Always remember to keep it strictly friendly and familiar, never flirtatious.

Practise makes perfect

Would-be-go-getters are often awestruck by the raw talent of successful networkers – this is a misconception. No one is a born networker – it is a learned skill. Some people might be more naturally confident, but that certainly does not make them a good networker. It takes endless hours of practise to fine-tune and master a fruitful networking style. So practise as much as you can.

Attend events that push you out of your comfort zone and try to leave with at least a few contacts. You have nothing to lose, so be bold. Like anything else in life, the more you practise, the easier it gets.

It may sound odd, but your networking skills spill over into your personal life too. Social occasions are equally important opportunities to network – but in this case, you are looking to make friends, or just create a relaxed and comfortable environment.

The same goes for networking within your company. Just because you have landed the job you want, doesn't mean you should stop networking – connect with people above and below you in the corporate structure. Offer support where and when you can, because one day you will probably need it in return.

Master the follow-up

You have spent a day connecting with the right people, swapped business cards – so now what? Always think ahead and plan how you are going to connect after the event. If possible, try to swap numbers and send a follow-up message the day after. Do not be too aggressive and stalk them: asking for a coffee or lunch meeting to chat is okay, asking them to swing past your house for a glass of wine probably isn't.

If you want to become a successful networker, remember you have to be self-motivated. The onus is on you to fine-tune your skills, because no one is going to do it for you. It is about being your own personal cheerleader, without anyone actually noticing. You will be surprised by how much it benefits other areas of your social life – and it might just land you the position you want.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tish Magongwa is the franchise marketing manager at Nashua.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>