

Network your way to your next job

Carina Tien shares how you can raise your profile with known and new contacts to bag new career opportunities

Many people wonder how networking can contribute to success in a job search. Surveys conducted over the past few years have shown that 75 per cent of job-seekers successfully landed their jobs through networking.

When we talk about networking, it applies to both business networking and social networking and the best place to network is **everywhere**: at the coffee shop, hair salon, at a friend's party, on the Internet, and so on.

Now you know that networking plays an important role in job searching, what comes to your mind next? Fear? Well, you won't need to worry if you prepare yourself adequately for any networking activity. The next question that flashes in your mind would probably be: "How and where do I start?"

Here are some suggestions on how to prepare yourself for business networking:

STEP 1

- Identify your focus and objectives of networking.

STEP 2

- Make a list of all the people you can think of: friends, former colleagues, ex-school mates, ex-suppliers, bosses, fellow members of associations and clubs, professional advisers, lawyers, doctors, neighbours, etc.
- Contact them via e-mail or the telephone (if the person knows you well). Try to gather from them:
 - Advice on current job trends, especially if you know that they are in a similar industry as you;
 - Names and addresses of other people who might help you further in your job search. Write to these people via e-mail to ask if you can meet them.

STEP 3

- Set up a business networking meeting.
- Prepare a list of questions to get the information and advice you want from the meeting.
- Make a follow-up telephone call after you have sent out the letter asking for a meeting. If the contact is not available to pick up your call, inform his secretary that you will call again. Do not agree to be called back, as most of the time they will not. Stay focused. Busy people are usually worth seeing.

STEP 4

- Take control of the meeting.
- Ensure you arrive 15 minutes prior to the agreed meeting time with your contact.
- State your objective for the meeting. For example, say:
"I am currently exploring areas where I can use my business development skills and experience in the aerospace industry. Mr Richard Tan told me that you have a wide knowledge of this industry and would be able to tell me more about it."
- Sell yourself by sharing your strengths or describing the functional roles you are seeking.
- Allow your contact to share his insights of the industry, such as the obstacles you might encounter.
- If he is not able to offer you any opportunities, try to get some additional contact details from him, such as who might give you further advice or information.

STEP 5 (THE MOST IMPORTANT STEP)

- After the meeting, write a thank-you letter. Do it within 24 hours.
- Use this letter as a fresh reminder as it may trigger immediate, extra useful information.
- This letter will make any future contact much more welcome.
- This letter also serves as a reminder for your contacts; if they hear about a possible job offer, they will have you in mind.

Here are some online business and social networking channels that you might want to sign up with to discover new leads and possible job openings:

- **Twitter (www.twitter.com)**
Twitter allows users to blog what kind of job they are looking for. TwitterJobSearch (www.twitterjobsearch.com) displays various job opportunities posted via Twitter.
- **Facebook (www.facebook.com)**
Facebook provides useful job searching and networking applications such as Job Snagger that allow users to search jobs and to connect with others to get job leads without ever leaving home.
- **LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com)**
This website allows users to add work history, skills and a resumé to their online profile. This site also allows users to search for jobs and to connect with professionals from other companies with whom they had prior contact.
- **MySpace (www.myspace.com)**
MySpace Jobs allows users to search for jobs and to view featured employers.

You should also visit industry-related trade shows as well to participate in networking events organised by clubs and associations. On a final note, when you network, do equip yourself with updated business cards. Remember, it is often not what you know but who knows you.

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