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NETWORKING



The Yin-yang of Online and In-Person Networking

By Carol Schiro Greenwald

Networking is about relationship building: moving from the initial handshake with an unfamiliar person through many contacts until you know each other well enough to be colleagues, clients, referral sources or friends. The road to collegiality leads through many personalized connection points.

Many networkers think these “touches” are best achieved in person. Others, who use technology all day, every day, think that social media interactions are a logical 21st century substitute for in person connections.

Most effective networkers use both avenues to make and develop connections. They may meet online but follow up by meeting for breakfast in person. Or someone who has many in-person networking activities each week may still request LinkedIn “links” with these people, or use technology to transmit content through blogs, newsletters and articles.



Carol Schiro Greenwald, Ph.D. is a strategist, coach, trainer and networking guru for lawyers. This article is drawn from her new book, *Strategic Networking for Introverts, Extroverts and Everyone in Between* (American Bar Association, Law Practice Division, 2019).

Risk adverse networkers worry about too much sharing online because they fear loss of privacy, cyber theft, ethics issues, and misinformation. They worry about revealing private information to online contacts who turn out to not be what they seem. These networkers tend to limit their networking. They become:

- Lurkers who read online but never participate by sharing information or joining conversations,
- Limited-use networkers who only use the internet to share content.

Those who prefer online networking cite the time saved because they don't have to travel to and from a meeting place. They love the ease of connecting from anywhere—in their car, on a train, walking down the street. They also appreciate the intellectual and geographic potential of the web and the breadth of contacts and visibility options that are available online.

Combining the two networking avenues, the networking yin-yang approach, is a valuable form of networking because it balances the ubiquity of internet networking options with the in-the-flesh authenticity of in-person meetings. This article reviews the range of online networking activities and then highlights some effective ways to integrate in-person and online networking.

ONLINE NETWORKING

According to Attorney at Work's 4th Annual Social Media Marketing Survey (2018) lawyers have embraced social media!

- Eight out of ten lawyers use social media.
- 85% of those lawyers say social media is part of their marketing strategy. They use it primarily for brand building or to stay in touch with clients and contacts.
- Lawyers' favorite sites are LinkedIn and Facebook. Although the question wasn't asked, it would seem logical that B2C lawyers who work with individuals are more likely to use Facebook where they can connect to people in the context of their personal life, while B2B business lawyers are more likely to favor LinkedIn, called the No.1 online professionals' networking site.
- Increasingly lawyers see the ROI of online activities. Seven out of 10 lawyers say social media is "very" or "somewhat" responsible for bringing in new clients.

The web is an excellent venue for business and professional purposes. Online you can:

- Connect or reconnect with people you want in your network;
- Leverage the national and international breadth of the web to compete outside your local area;
- Build an online audience interested in your thought leadership, your services, or your online relationships with others;
- Broaden your mind by following the ideas and activities of influencers;
- Stay visible and top of mind.

Both LinkedIn and Facebook offer opportunities to join subject-matter, institutional [think company or college alumni groups], social, community, and demographic-focused groups that introduce you to communities of people with similar interests. Through this kind of group participation members get to know each other informally. When it becomes appropriate for you to offer information related to your work expertise, your reply is believable to the others because it occurs within the shared discussion context.

Participating in these conversations also provides an opportunity to learn about your target audience in terms of their interests, their opinions, their "hotspots," and



their jargon. This kind of knowledge helps you blend into your prospects' and clients' worlds.

The increasing online participation of lawyers is paralleled by an increasing number of lawyer-focused websites. A Google search for "lawyer or attorney social networking sites" yields 129 million entries. The sites range from open social networks like LinkedIn to lawyer directories to invitation-only, private networking groups. Some sites are platforms for disseminating content such as Justia and LexBlog. Others are listservs and single-subject groups that share knowledge informally among members. Because lawyers use LinkedIn more than any other online platform, we will look at some of its networking opportunities.

LINKEDIN

LinkedIn is the largest professional networking online site, with more than 500 million members. Professionals use the site to:

- Connect to people they know or want to meet;
- Connect to people they want to stay looped in with after they have met them;
- Circulate articles, event invitations and updates;
- Research people, companies, and places as part of their in-person networking preparations;
- Begin a dialogue with thought leaders;
- Make referrals and get referred;
- Join and participate in groups that are important to them or to their niche markets.

LinkedIn Groups: As with in-person networking, group memberships make it easier to build a solid contacts list because you can interact with many potential connections at once. There are literally thousands of LinkedIn groups. LinkedIn allows you to join up to 100 of them.

Of course, join your alumni groups, professional associations and online groups that parallel the in-person groups and organizations you belong to. Then, look for groups with like-minded people in similar professions who can help you expand your referral network. Join groups of people with similar interests.

Go where your clients, referral sources and those in allied industries and professions go. Join groups that provide information about industry or demographically-relevant trends. For example, health care, elder law and T&E lawyers could join AARP (an umbrella organization focused on the needs of those over 50 years old), retirement planning groups, trade and professional association groups ranging from geriatric consultants to health care providers, locally focused senior citizen advocacy groups, groups for financial planners, bankers and accountants who target the elderly and, of course, bar associations.

SIDEBAR: Helpful Hints for Online Networking

BE CONSISTENT

- Be the same person on and offline. The competencies you showcase online should be obvious in person when you talk about the benefits of your expertise.
- Remember what your goals are.
- Continue your in-person networking strategy online.

COURTESY FIRST—THANK PEOPLE

- When they connect with you.
- When they look at your profile.
- When they like, share, or comment on your posts.
- When they provide answers to your questions or make introductions for you.

KEEP ALL POSTS ON ALL VENUES PROFESSIONAL

- That photo of you on the beach that you posted 10 years ago is still available online. Think if it presents the image you want to present today. If it doesn't, take it down.
- Protect your online reputation.
- Remember online media, like in-person activities, has a social component—so emphasize sharing rather than selling.
- Give-to-get because what goes around comes around.

If you have a B2C focus, you may want to seek out groups built around the personal interests of those you want to work with, such as Mom's groups, PTAs, book clubs, religious social groups, hobby groups, etc.

LinkedIn groups can be excellent sources of career or practice-related information and innovative ideas. Join the groups that people you follow for their ideas belong to.

ONLINE ETIQUETTE

Just as in-person networking assumes certain attitudes and etiquette, so too does online networking. Personalization is important in both settings. For example, when you invite someone to link to you, it is a best practice

to add a few words about where you have met or who you know in common or why you want to connect with them.

When someone has looked at your LinkedIn profile, consider sending them a message saying, “Thank you for taking the time to review my profile. Can I help you in any way?” (or) “Would you like to meet for coffee?” If someone adds an online testimonial for you, send a message thanking them for their help.

When you participate in online conversations, use them as an opportunity to showcase your expertise or personal experience with the issue at hand. Don’t say “Great article.” Instead say, “Great article because [and then give a reason].” Your reasoning becomes a billboard showing everyone else in the group how you think and how you feel about issues shared in the group. A thoughtful conversation thread becomes a reputation builder establishing you as an expert.

COMBINING ONLINE AND OFFLINE NETWORKING

Many organizations do it for you. Online groups hold in-person events. In-person organizations use online options to form groups, send invitations, and so on. Most in-person networking groups have websites where the public can learn about the group. Many also offer member-only email-based listservs. Often, groups that meet in person use social media sites such as Meetup.com to attract members, announce their schedules, and have participants register for specific activities.

Effective personal networking should also combine online and in-person activities so that they complement and reinforce each other. In-person networking satisfies basic human needs. People are animals. We need to sniff out strangers, touch the merchandise and assess the authenticity of those we meet.

Researchers generally agree that there is a psychological difference between online and in-person relationships. Social media facilitates connections but creates little emotional involvement. By contrast, in-person encounters provide emotional and physiological benefits.

Grow your contacts list: Just as in-person networking is built around the give-to-get principle, so, too, take advantage of internet opportunities to share knowledge and make introductions. Use the reach of the internet to extend the possibilities that turn up with in-person networking.

When you meet in person, invite people to connect with you online. When you meet online and want to make sure there is a fit with your strategic networking goals, plan an in-person meeting or phone call. When you identify interesting people through group conversations, link to them and, if possible, invite them to join you for an in-person coffee.

LinkedIn offers an excellent yin-yang opportunity to grow your own network when people share those on their contact lists with colleagues. This is a multi-step process:

1. First you pick a colleague who is probably linked to people you would like to know.
2. Then you review that person’s connections and



- select one or two people you would like to meet.
3. You ask your connection to scan your connections and find individuals of interest.
 4. Each person then invites their identified connections to a joint breakfast or lunch.
 5. At the meal, the two who already know each other lead the conversation to highlight relevant aspects of their connections.
 6. When successful, the two lead connectors have strategically broadened their networks. The sharing aspect of the activity speeds up the relationship building process.

Keep growing your contacts base. Add people you meet at in-person events. When you see synergies through online conversations or in-person conversations, make introductions. Use internet sites to search through rosters from your schools and previous employers to become reacquainted with old colleagues and friends.

Research people before you meet them: LinkedIn and other networking sites offer excellent options for investigating people before you meet them. Use the opportunity to learn about breakfast and lunch colleagues, guest speakers, networking group leaders, and so on.

- Read their online bios for a sense of what is important to them.
- Scroll down to the personal section to learn something about their private life.
- If the site shows you share contacts, be sure to make a note about this so you can begin a conversation on common ground.

- If you have never met in person, pay attention to the person's photograph so you will recognize them when you meet.

Think globally. Online offers a way to extend your reach beyond your local geographic area. Follow global trends online if it is appropriate for your business. When you travel, search your online contacts for people who live where you are going, and connect. Before conferences, research who else you know will be there and make plans to connect.

Keep in touch: The internet makes it easy to keep in touch between in-person meetings. For example, you can:

- Use online personalization reminders to send birthday cards, anniversary cards, and other appropriate personal cards to people you know.
- When you learn through online sites that people have work anniversaries, change jobs, marry or have children, send a note or a personalized card.
- If appropriate, send a note on the anniversary of a successful case.

Combining the advantages of online and in-person networking adds both depth and breadth to your initiatives. Use the breadth of the internet to share knowledge and expand your own intellectual horizons. Use the depth of in-person connections to move in a targeted way toward your personal and career goals.

