

CONTACT US



Five fool-proof ways to avoid a social networking faux pas



People

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Given the newness of social media and other communications tools, it's easy to do or say the wrong thing. Unfortunately, missteps in this area can have lasting repercussions: An online mistake can show up next to your name in an Internet search for many years to come.

Professional networking sites are one of the most popular ways to cultivate and nurture professional relationships. The goal of networking online is no different than age-old, in-person networking events – it's vital that you make a positive impression. To do so, you must follow the rules of the road. Check out these ways to get the most out of LinkedIn and similar networking sites:



Jaynie Ellison

Complete your profile. The more information you include, the better. Provide as much information in your profile as you can. Include your professional summary (be creatively concise to generate interest), work history (be specific), and education (no need to include high school, and being cutesy isn't really all that cute). Be sure to add key accomplishments (design or sales achievement awards, sales rankings, certifications) so other users get a clear picture of your capabilities. Also, request recommendations from past colleagues, managers, and clients (happy ones, of course). By highlighting and praising your accomplishments, they illustrate your skills and experience with fullness and sincerity, which demonstrates who you are professionally.

Request recommendations individually. Do you walk around a room at a party or networking event repeating the same phrase over and over to everyone you come in contact with? The correct answer is no. Being generic elicits a generic response (or no response at all). Be genuine if you want to be heard. Consider this: Who wants to take the time to create a personal recommendation for someone who can't take the time to personally address them? You should also reciprocate. If it's permissible by your company, return the favor. Recommend people who you know the best and trust the most. A word of caution: Avoid what may be seen as quid pro quo recommendations. You want your kudos to others to be sincere. If you endorse someone as they have just recommended you, it may be viewed as "payback."

Prioritize quality over quantity. We all know "friend collectors." They want to have more friends or connections than anyone they know. They brag about it, and they link aimlessly to anyone who will give them the time of day just to build their number of contacts. Some are even competitive about it. Don't invite strangers to your network just to make it larger. It isn't effective. Remember, quality is what you are going for. Oh yeah, and don't be offended when those you've never met or barely know ignore your requests. Your network is only as strong as its weakest connection so make all of your connections count.

Be a joiner. LinkedIn offers an infinite number of groups for people who share professions or interests, and these can be an invaluable asset for keeping pace with new developments in your industry. When participating in professional groups, provide useful information and input. Talking just to be heard is clearly recognizable. Be respectful even when you disagree with others. Discussion boards are an open forum, not a private conversation between trusted colleagues (all eyes are on you). Finally, avoid sending direct messages to fellow group members unless you have established a personal connection beforehand.

10 Top LinkedIn Professional Groups

Good business etiquette on LinkedIn includes participating in discussions and doing small favors for others. The following are the top 10 LinkedIn Groups ranked by number of members.* To access the LinkedIn Groups Directory, go to the search box and click on "Groups" from the pull-down menu:

1. Linked: HR (#1 Human Resources Group)
2. Job Openings, Job Leads and Job Connections!
3. Marketing Association Network

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You also may want to find out if your various alumni and trade associations have any LinkedIn groups. If so, be sure to join those you find most appealing.

Say 'please' and be respectful. If you would like an introduction to someone in a contact's network, always explain why you hope to meet the other person. For example, you might point out that the potential contact is in a professional association of interest to you. Remember your manners; saying "please" and "thank you" tends to work wonders as well.

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