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Nine ways to keep social networking from taking over your life



People

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Tending to your social network can be overwhelming, and the rules of the road aren't always clear when using this medium to connect with other professionals. Next month, I will take a closer look at the ins and outs of good social networking etiquette. In fact, "Miss Manners" may be looking to you for online etiquette tips by the time we are done, but for now, let's focus on time management.



Networking online doesn't need to be time consuming. You can develop your professional reputation and help others in the process through simple etiquette practices that require only a few minutes each day. In fact, devoting just five minutes a day will do the trick.

1. Be the first to have a point of view. Share a relevant news article and add your insight.
2. Let them know they've heard. Listen to what your network has to say, and respond accordingly. You will gain respect and credibility
3. Establish yourself as the go-to person. Connecting your LinkedIn and Twitter accounts will establish more visibility. Tweet your professional ideas and links into your profile using the hash tag #in. However, think twice before connecting your LinkedIn account to other location-based social networks. Do the people in your professional network really need or want to know where you just ate lunch?
4. Try to add at least one new person to your network a week. Show signs of viability. Growing networks are far more effective than stagnant ones.
5. Make the connection clear. Too often, people connect without thinking. Using the generic LinkedIn invitation standard isn't effective. When seeking to make a new contact, remind a person of how you know each other. If it has been a while since you've talked, you might reference a recent conference you both attended or a mutual connection you share.
6. Don't be one-sided. A "ME, ME, ME" approach won't get you very far. Enlist the help of your network. LinkedIn allows you to ask for help from members of your network quickly and easily, but don't abuse this privilege with constant requests. When someone helps out, be sure to thank them, and always look to return the favor. Be quick to step up and help. "Paying it forward" goes a long way in establishing your online networking reputation.
7. Act quickly on requests. Respond to requests that come via your network ASAP— within 24 hours- when possible. Patience is a virtue, but not everyone possesses it.
8. Keep it professional. Think before you post, and don't post too often or on trivial subjects. Your aim should be to become a trusted expert rather than the class clown. You are not performing at open mic night at the local coffeehouse. Sharing a video clip of your musical rendition of Phoebe Buffet's "Smelly Cat" (from the sitcom Friends) is okay for your Facebook buddies, but not so much for LinkedIn. That said, it's okay to share personal interests such as athletics and hobbies, as well as a profile picture so that others can begin to know you.
9. Make a big impact with small gestures. Pay attention. Take notice of what people are saying or working on. Offer helpful suggestions, send useful articles or just leave comments. It lets those in your network know you hear and understand them. You can share perceptions and offer introductions to others who can be helpful as well. This effort takes about 30-45 seconds but makes the right impression on the people you want to develop closer professional relationships with.

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