

Web-based social networks have surpassed their stature as online communities for young people and have emerged as a powerful avenue for professionals to make connections. There are three particular social networking sites that professionals should explore if they are serious about expanding their contacts and building their career development options.

More Employers Turning to Social Networks as Channel for Recruiting New Talent

The concept of professional networking is as old as the cocktail party, but the leveraging of online technology for this purpose is still growing in popularity. Originally launched as a means of social interaction between younger audiences, Web-based social networks have now achieved status as a great way to share more sophisticated content with others and stay connected to peers on the Internet.

For employers, they also offer a strategy for coping with the current economic pressures and ongoing talent shortages. These challenging times are forcing employers to be more creative in their recruitment efforts in order to find the best possible candidates for their organizations. With more employers turning to social networks as a recruiting channel, they have become a terrific medium for building your career.

Social networks provide a fresh avenue for professionals to make new contacts without the time expenditure incurred attending mixers or scheduling lunches. That's because they offer the ability to reach a universe of individuals who might be able to make valuable introductions or recommendations for you. Instead of hunting for a specific job, members of the network look to reach out and expand their network - in turn expanding their job opportunities. Often, building connections with other members results in accessing top jobs that aren't published in classifieds or traditional job postings.

The concept behind using social networks to find a job is easy: The more connections you make within the network, the more friends-of-a-friend you can meet, and the better your chances of finding an employer or key contact who can make an introduction that might result in an employment opportunity for you. If you have not already done so, there are three major social networking sites you should explore right away if you are serious about expanding your network of professional contacts and building your career development options:

1. **LinkedIn:** Take a few minutes to search LinkedIn and I'm sure you'll find lots of contacts from your current and prior employers, clients, vendors, and schools. All those contacts have the potential to help you grow your career or find a new job. In addition, it can be a good source of employment references, as well as reference checking. You can also search the Jobs section of LinkedIn by keyword and location or used the Advanced Search option to search by more specific criteria. The truth is that LinkedIn has reached a point where it's almost unprofessional not to be on LinkedIn; there are members from all 500 of the Fortune 500 companies in 130 different industries.



2. Facebook: Social networking is not only a great way to market yourself - it's also a great way to learn about prospective employers who are seeking to find you. In fact, you might be surprised at some of the companies that have Facebook corporate profiles. These Facebook profiles will provide you with specific information on how to contact the employer or recruiter if you wish to create a dialogue.
3. MySpace: In addition to companies that use career networking sites, like LinkedIn and Facebook, to recruit, there are employers who use MySpace to scope out candidates for employment. These companies look through the right lens, understand the communication skills of this generation and are willing to set aside their biases in order to find a terrific candidate. Don't worry about scraping personal interests or hobbies from your profile (assuming there is nothing offensive or inappropriate) because most employers look holistically at the entire candidate and are interested in what they can learn about you as a person. For example, a cutting edge employer, especially in less traditional industries, may not mind a creative profile and will understand the distinction between that person's private life and the employee they may hire.

As with traditional “cocktail party” networking, social networking works best when you don't really need it to pay off for you - as a long-term career development safety net, rather than a tool for a quick-hit job offer. So forward-thinking accounting professionals won't wait until they need their social network to get it started; embrace this exciting technology wave and build yours now.