


Networking with peers can provide value



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Social and **business networking** are big. It seems the masses have figured out what many well-connected business people already knew: that having the right connections and using them well can make all the difference to your success.

A networking group can be an excellent resource for information, leads, camaraderie and more. The key is to find the right group for your needs. Today, many people are turning to the Internet.

According to Bob Ivins, executive vice president of international markets for comScore, a leader in measuring the digital world, "Literally hundreds of millions of people around the world are visiting social networking sites each month and many are doing so on a daily basis. It would appear that social networking is not a fad but rather an activity that is being woven into the very fabric of the global Internet."

Network envy

LinkedIn is an example of an online social/business networking group for professionals. It is a great resource if you're looking for a job or a job candidate, and it lets you build networking relationships as well as reconnect with past co-workers and friends.

People use sites such as LinkedIn to stay connected, get answers to questions, locate subject matter experts, expand their personal network and so on. Some people swear by these virtual networks.

As for me, right or wrong, I have declined countless invitations to join in. The size of my network is just fine, thank you. I am more interested in the quality of my network than the size of my network. And given that people I barely know have invited me into their network, the usefulness of these networks appears somewhat suspect to me. For some, it seems the size of their network is the goal.

Be more discriminating

I have nothing against Internet-based business networking sites, or other clubs, associations and companies designed to connect and assist business professionals, as long as they provide value to the participants. In fact, the right group (network) can be a source of much-needed and much-appreciated support and information. The right group can enhance your growth both personally and on a corporate level. Getting input from outside of your management team will bring new energy, experience and insights to your work. The ideas of other engaged

members should and hopefully will expand your horizons and business opportunities.

So, what's the best way to make your business network meaningful and effective? Start by being discriminating. When you're evaluating a networking group, ask their members how effective that network has been in helping to promote the growth and development of its members. Ask for specific examples. Ask yourself how effective and impactful you believe you can be at contributing to the growth and development of the network group you are considering joining. In the end, that's what really matters.

Peer-to-peer networking is my preference. Organizations such as YPO (Young Presidents Organization), TEC (The Executive Committee) or any of the other business networking groups that are designed to align peers with peers. Also, consider establishing your own group. Over the years, I have had countless clients who have formed networks of five to 10 non-competitive peers within their industry. It doesn't matter if you're a \$5 million company or a \$5 billion company, a peer-to-peer network can help you grow and develop. Again, the goal is to share best and worst practices, bring in new perspectives, challenge the status quo and have a safe place to test out new ideas.

So get out there. Leverage the intellect of your peers. Learn from their mistakes, and return the favor by sharing lessons you've learned. In today's world, managers that connect, learn, share and grow are the most likely to succeed.

