

Site equates to MySpace for businesses

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It's talked about, blogged about and reached the point that you're not "in" unless you're LinkedIn.

Just as college students join social networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook to stay in touch with friends and classmates, more and more sites are popping up to help business professionals do the same.

Some of Fort Collins' most notables are members of the site, including UniverCity Connections director Doug Johnson and Beet Street executive director Carol Bennis.

"It's kind of like an electronic Rolodex," said Amy Madden Copp, director of marketing for Front Range Internet Inc. "It's like going to a business after-hours without having to go."

LinkedIn is just one of many such sites that take a more professional approach to creating connections with "business people you trust" and keeping in touch with those you do business with.

Rather than posting weekend party pictures like many users of Facebook and Myspace do, LinkedIn users can essentially post their résumés and build a list of business contacts, also known as "connections."

The site, launched in May 2003, now has more than 20 million registered users in more than 150 industries.

Communication expert and "Miss Communications" columnist for the Coloradoan Margaret McDonald said professional networking sites such as LinkedIn can have a positive impact on business communication, providing the opportunity to do some research before making that initial contact.

"There's less of a chance they'll be asking the wrong questions to the wrong people," she said. "I don't think being online takes away from communication opportunities you would otherwise have."

And even though Madden Copp finds the site useful now, she had her reservations in the beginning with certain issues, such as privacy and how much information about her would be available.

Users can decide exactly what information to include or omit, leading some to be skeptical of the site that doesn't verify the information a user posts.

Other popular business networking sites include Ryze.com, PartnerUp and StartupNation.

Some worry that LinkedIn is just a phase and a new site boasting bigger and better networking will take over.

"LinkedIn is definitely working to expand and augment what kind of capabilities they provide," said Brad Shannon, founder of Shannon Marketing Communications and a LinkedIn user. "It's a good way to share information on an ongoing basis if you've got something to tackle."