

Lesson 11 Worksheet: Combining Online and Offline Networking

This worksheet will help you grow your network exponentially by combining face-to-face and online networking.

1. Offline to online

When you meet new business contacts in the real world, use online networking to continue the conversations and grow the relationships.

(i) What online networks are your contacts using?

Go through your collection of business cards from networking events. How many of them feature social networking profile links? What social networks are most common?

Which networks do you receive the most invitations to join from people you know?

Which networks do people around you talk about the most?

(ii) Social docking

Get into the habit of adding people as online contacts (what Russell Davies calls 'social docking') shortly after meeting them face-to-face. The sooner you do this, the fresher you will be in their minds, and the easier it will be to continue the conversation.

When you coming from a networking event, empty your business cards onto the desk next to your computer, to remind yourself to do it.

2. Online

(i) Focus on one or two networks

Ideally you want to identify one or two social networks where you are active every week. These are the ones that deliver the best return on investment, in terms of building relationships with the people who matter to you.

Being active on social networks is an important way of maintaining visibility within your community. People aren't joking when they talk about the 'digital village', where people feel comfortable doing business with familiar faces. And you don't need to spend huge amounts of time doing it. You can maintain a lot of relationships and visibility in as little as 15 minutes a day – so you could do it during a coffee break or a quiet period of the working day.

Different networks serve different purposes, and allow you to connect with different types of people. Here are some distinctions between some of the most popular social networks:

Facebook

For connecting with family, friends and (potentially) fans.

Twitter

For getting reaction to the latest events and connecting with online influencers.

LinkedIn

For maintaining your professional network – colleagues, clients, and other people you have had business dealings with in real life.

Behance

The Behance network is a slick and stylish network built around portfolios to showcase creative work. If you have a visual portfolio to display, and you're trying to attract commissions from agencies and big brands, Behance is one place to get your work seen.

(ii) Find your friends

Most networks have a feature that allows you to import the e-mail addresses of your contacts from your e-mail software, which generates a list of 'people you may know' on the network. Use this to start your list of contacts.

Next, go to the profile of a popular friend, and look through their list of contacts, adding the ones you know.

As you grow your network, the site will probably keep feeding you suggestions based on the people you already know – use this to keep adding to your list of contacts.

(iii) Listen

Spend time listening to online conversations, by reading updates from your contacts and noticing how they interact with each other. This will give you a wealth of information, not just about the individuals concerned, but also about what works in online networking. Pay attention to the people who are doing it well, and making you (and others) want to get to know them better – as well as those who make you want to avoid them!

(v) Join the conversation

As with a real-life networking event, your best bet is to join the conversation gracefully and naturally, showing interest in others and doing your best to help or entertain them, or just hang out and have fun together. Easy ways to do this are to share links to interesting or useful articles, and to answer questions that other users are asking.

It's fine to include occasional links to your own blog posts, articles and new products or upcoming events – but beware of looking too selfish. If all you put out is sales messages, most people will lose interest.

Another pitfall to avoid is talking too much about the mundane details of your daily life. It's important to be yourself, and come across as a human being, but I prefer to do this through banter and chitchat, rather than telling everyone what I'm having for lunch, which I can't imagine will interest them remotely. So unless you routinely slay dragons or rescue children from the top of tall buildings, beware of sending out too many updates about your daily activities.

3. Online to offline

(i) Go to social media events

Many towns and cities now have regular meet ups for creatives. CreativeMornings.com and MeetUp.com are good places to find meetings in your area.

(ii) Suggest meeting for coffee

When you make online contact with someone in your local area who is really interesting and potentially useful to you, then suggest meeting for coffee next time you're both in town. I've done this with loads of people over the past few years, and quite a few business relationships and projects have resulted from it. (As I said in the lesson, take sensible safety precautions, e.g. meeting in a busy central location, not the remote clifftop at midnight.)