

The New Face of Professional Networking: *Online Social Networks Offer a Mix of Opportunities and Challenges for Job Seekers*

By Elizabeth M. Lengyel, PeopleCoach, Inc.

Networking still tops the charts to find the right work. Moreover, although I remain an advocate for the strength of in-person networks, I can see the growing success of online social networks. They're bubbling to the surface and gaining popularity!

I've been a member of LinkedIn for a while now. However, it never really grabbed me. Maybe it's because this online social network's target audience is professionals, without the feeling of personal rapport. I've also noticed an underlying trend in which people appear more interested in "adding numbers" of connections to grow their business instead of building real relationships based on trust - something I believe is foundational to networking.

Out of curiosity, I decided to join Facebook, partly as a way to grow friendships and partly to see whether I could use it to nurture a meaningful network. So far, the activity has been slow, but I hear it builds momentum over time. We'll see.

In the meantime, these recent experiences with online social networks have shown me this: The line between social and professional networking is really blurred!

If you're searching for work - looking for a new job or an entirely new career - where do you draw the line? Recognize that online social networks such as Facebook showcase the whole person. You're opening your kimono (so to speak) and letting the whole world see the real you.

If you're on the prowl for a job, review your Facebook or MySpace profile. Make sure it's personable, yet professional. This is an amazing opportunity to present to your potential employers who you are - your interests, passions, observations - while still maintaining your professionalism and integrity. Remember, everyone can peek into your worldview. You want to build your reputation, not taint it.

Here are five tips to use Facebook immediately in your job search:

1. Apply a keen eye when looking at your profile. Ask yourself what you want friends, colleagues, recruiters, and prospective employers to see – and what you don't.
2. Craft a simple profile or clean up the one you have. Use minimal graphics and links that can be distracting and appear unprofessional.
3. Post content relevant to your job search and expertise.
4. Use Facebook to build trusting relationships, not just a list of empty connections.
5. As in life overall, choose your friends wisely! Remember, your linked-friends can see information about you *and* your friends in your profile. Apply caution!

Be sure to approach your online social network with the same level of professionalism and integrity as you would face-to-face networking. Remember, a perfect stranger who links to your network probably can't help you find great work. However, a new friend you meet through your network – someone who gets to know and trust the real you – can become a tremendous asset to help you take the next, great step in your career.

About Elizabeth M. Lengyel and PeopleCoach, Inc.

Elizabeth M. Lengyel, President of PeopleCoach, Inc., delivers career breakthroughs. A trusted career strategist and advisor, Elizabeth is passionate about helping professionals get juiced about their careers. The result? Clarity, energy, and lasting impact by landing a great job in the right career. Visit www.PeopleCoach.com to receive Career Boost, a free 7-part audio program, and to hear her invigorating weekly radio show: *Career Juice! Refresh & Revitalize Your Work*.

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