

Social Netiquette: The Rules of Engagement for Networking Professionals

As more companies vet prospective vendors, strategic partners and new hires based on their online social networking profiles, the line between our personal lives and professional lives is becoming increasingly blurred.

For marketers, social networks offer a powerful opportunity for brand building — merely sitting back as a passive observer is no longer an option. But with issues like Facebook privacy making headlines, how do we take advantage of online networking opportunities while making the distinction between business and pleasure? This can be especially challenging for small businesses, in which the owner and the brand are often synonymous.

Managing Your Identities

In a recent article on social networking in the workplace, Forbes introduced "multiple selves" — the concept that who we are in the office is separate from who we are when we're with our friends and family. There are some who may brush off this perceived divide as old fashioned — and not feasible in the quest for transparency and authenticity. But for every connection

made online, we guarantee one is missed because of the dreaded "TMI" — too much information of a personal nature.

Separating Business from Pleasure

The first step in managing your online identity and observing proper social networking etiquette is to determine what kind of information, and how much, you want to share. Do you want to keep your work and friends/family personas completely separate? If so, you'll want to either create two separate Facebook accounts (and appropriately modify the privacy settings for each), or create one personal Facebook account and one professional LinkedIn account, for example.

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How Not to Network Your Horror Stories Revealed

Almost anyone who's attended a business networking event has met that one person they'll never forget — for all the wrong reasons. We asked veteran networkers to

share with us their most squirm-inducing experiences in an effort to analyze where others have gone wrong, and where you can make a conscious effort to go right. Some characters may just seem to be suffering simple failures of common sense, but there's a deeper and more valuable lesson to be learned from each of these tales from the networking crypt.

On Keeping it Clean

Let's start with the downright absurd thanks to Mike, "The Magalog Guy" (magalogguy.com). "As a guy handed me his business card at an event, we both noticed it had something on it. I figured it might be food. He scratched off the unknown substance and handed me

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*What Your Body Says
(and how to master
the message)*



Letter from the Editor

These days, the art of marketing is more personal than ever — connecting on a one-to-one level that demonstrates just how well you understand your customers' needs and are uniquely equipped to meet them.

From Facebook to the old-school Chamber of Commerce breakfast, companies of every size have a tremendous opportunity to expand their reach through networking — and to do some serious damage to their growth trajectory if they go about it the wrong way.

When we put out a call for networking horror stories, clearly we stumbled on a hot-button issue. Within hours, we were deluged with submissions, ranging from the chuckle inducing to the completely disgusting.

Online or face to face, make no mistake — the basics of common sense and good conduct still apply. Here are some clues that you may want to reconsider your networking approach:

- The words “we” and “us” on your website far outnumber the word “you.”
- You leave a networking event with a sore throat from talking so much — and barely a recollection of people’s names.
- Your LinkedIn outbox is filled with more “pending” invitations than accepted.

As personal as marketing has become, it’s also becoming increasingly impersonal at the same time. Services like Facebook foster an artificial sense of intimacy, making us feel connected when what we’re really doing is observing.

Marketing will always be about cultivating real relationships — those based on mutual respect and shared values. Instead of measuring success by the amount of business cards you collect or “likes” on your fan page, why not concentrate on the ultimate metric — your bottom line?

To your marketing success,

Lisa Fahoury, Editor

Social Netiquette (from p. 1)

A good rule of thumb: Don’t post anything that you wouldn’t share with a sales lead, client, business colleague, or your grandma. This includes opinions that could be considered inflammatory, and anything that could be perceived as unproductive or unfocused (Farmville, horoscope games and pop culture quizzes come to mind!) Keep posts on-topic and respectful, and avoid sending group invitations to users who may not be interested.

The Company You Keep

Once you’ve divided your “selves,” it’s time to start reaching out and making professional connections. Check out the profile of someone you’re thinking of adding to your contacts. Is their content professionally focused and relevant, or is it a messy mix of personal opinion, weekend warrior activities, and inappropriate subject matter? Are they someone you want to be associated with on a professional level? If the answer is no, move on.

Once you’ve found some promising connections, it’s time to make the first move. The number one rule when attempting to make a new connection? Send a message along with your request. Include a personal note that explains why you want to connect with this person — maybe you’re members of the same LinkedIn group, or you work in a similar industry and could mutually benefit from sharing ideas and information.

Online tools are a handy way to circle back with new contacts you’ve met at in-person events. Be sure to give a brief refresher: “We met at the Business Marketing Association luncheon last week, and I’d love to continue our conversation about event marketing.” Avoid sending connection requests to “just anyone” — this is a fast track to wasted time and an ultimate failure if your goal is to build a network in every sense of the word.

Gracefully Declining Online Invitations

You may receive friend requests from colleagues or clients who stumble across your personal page in a social network’s directory. If this should happen, it’s perfectly acceptable to decline. However, be sure to send a message explaining that, while you value the professional relationship, you don’t add work-related contacts to that particular profile. If you have a separate professional profile, include the link and request a connection there instead.

By carefully managing your social networking profiles, you can avoid many of the common pitfalls that other unfortunate users encounter when their un-censored personal information becomes available to their current and potential employers by way of colleagues or direct connections. Choosing the right connections, introducing yourself, and maintaining professional content is the key to getting the most out of your online networking experience.

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Networking Horror Stories (from p. 1)

the card, saying, 'Must be a booger.' Taken off guard, I actually took the card instead of suggesting he give me another one. I did throw the card away after the event."

Never forget that image matters. It's not limited to clean clothes and breath mints — it carries over to our marketing collateral as well. Your card might not contain any "inadvertent organic matter," but a crossed-out email address, smudge or creased corner is nearly as bad.

On Not Being "That Guy"

A Detroit-based networking group (detroitnet.org) called our attention to its hilarious series of blog posts, "Don't Be That Guy." So far they've covered "PowerPoint Guy," "Inspirational Quote Guy," and other sad stereotypes.

The bottom line? Simple common sense. You want the people you meet to remember you

for a positive reason, not as "that annoying dude with the fauxhawk who showed off his iPhone4 all night." Turn off your BlackBerry, take off the Bluetooth, and connect like a human being for an hour or two, will ya?

On Avoiding The Hard Sell

Laura, who networks for her sales training business (dancingelephants.net), shares a hard-sell warning: "A life insurance salesman would show up to events, give everyone his sales pitch, then quickly exchange business cards. He would follow up the very next morning and was very aggressive if you said no. He ruined his reputation fast by being such a shark."

Pushy, one-way networking is the single most effective way to unemployment, because people will go out of their way to NOT do business with you. It helps to equate good networking with good karma — the more sincere help and bona fide referrals

you offer, the more you are likely to receive in return.

Thank you to all the contributors who shared their experiences! We're sorry we didn't have room for more.

Hopefully you did not see yourself in any of these tales of networking gone bad. But they do serve as a valuable reminder that even the most skilled networkers can use a regular strategy checkup to ensure you're not turning into "that guy."

“ Marketing is not only about being known; it's about not being forgotten. ”
Robert Middleton



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What Your Body Says (and how to master the message)

Sharon Saylor

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Words are just a small part of communicating, according to Sharon Saylor, author of the new book, *What Your Body Says (and how to master the message)*.

Nonverbal gestures — body movements, eye contact, even breathing — are a direct expression of our thoughts and emotions. By developing an understanding of nonverbal communication, we can understand the messages we might be inadvertently sending — and replace them with nonverbals that establish trust and build solid relationships.

For example, try these techniques the next time you're in a networking situation, such as giving your 30-second elevator pitch:

- Gesture with your palm facing up; this makes others feel they are the center of attention.
- Vary the pitch of your voice to keep listeners' attention and to emphasize particular points.
- Avoid unintentional nonverbal "fidgets" like swaying, touching your face or hair, or exhaling through your mouth.

By being aware of your intent — to communicate a confident, intelligent and friendly persona — and using intentional rather than unconscious gestures when networking, you can be sure the right message comes through loud and clear.



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Inside: The Networking Issue



Perfecting Your Pitch: 5 Tips for Success

“So, what do you do?” A simple question, but one that can strike tremendous fear in the hearts of the unprepared.

Creating the perfect elevator pitch takes some conversational finesse. After all, how can you grab someone’s attention, communicate substantive benefits, and leave them wanting more information, all usually in 30 seconds or less?

Here are five hints to help you craft an effective pitch that will have you striking up sales opportunities wherever you go.

1. Spark interest with a strong set-up. Start with a well-worded, concise and no-fluff line that prompts your listener to ask

further questions. Try to tell a one-sentence story about what you do that tangibly benefits your clients. For example, “We help residential contractors close more sales by cutting down on the time it takes to prepare an accurate estimate.” High-energy delivery shows that you really believe in your work and are passionate about your customers’ success.

2. Describe what sets you apart. What makes you different from the competition? This is one of the most memorable pieces of your pitch, because it is one of the most influential when it comes to making a buying decision. “Because our estimating solution works with a tablet PC or mobile app, it doesn’t require being tied to a desk. You can prepare detailed estimates on the spot, right from the job site.”

3. Engage with questions of your own. If your prospect seems interested, ask how they currently handle the task in question. “How long does your firm generally need

to turn around an estimate? Does that seem to meet with your customers’ overall expectations?”

4. Include a call to action. Depending on your prospect’s perceived level of interest, request a mutually convenient follow-up to discuss their needs. Not a prospect, but a worthwhile contact nonetheless? Suggest meeting to see how you might be able to help each other with referrals.

5. Rehearse, rehearse, rehearse. Practice your pitch until you can recite it in a natural, conversational tone. The more comfortable you seem, the more effective you’ll be.

Creating an elevator pitch that doesn’t sound so much like a “sales pitch” may seem like a challenge, but with a little preparation you’ll have generated an extremely useful marketing tool that you can use anywhere.