

How to build effective, professional networks (Part III)

If you have completed Part I and II of this series, you will have begun the process of identifying existing and potential professional networks. The following exercises are designed to help with the continued expansion and maintenance of this network.

Who else do you know?

Refer to the following list and use it to expand the list of people in your professional network. Again, group the names into categories with a new circle for each.

- Your peer group
- People you work with regularly
- People you know who are able to fill in for you
- Contacts at organisations that have employed you in the past, even once
- Professionals at current and previous work experience locations, including coordinators
- People whose work has influenced you – are they contactable?
- Mentors and potential mentors
- Past and present teachers, lecturers, and speakers
- People who have reviewed your performance
- Editors (if you write for the press)
- Designers who have done work on your promotional material, merchandise and website, etc.
- Contacts at media organisations used to advertise your services/products
- Your students or clients
- Contacts at schools and businesses
- Your fans
- Your online social network 'friends'

- Your online discussion groups
- Online connections through networks such as LinkedIn

Having incorporated these lists (circles) of people into your professional network, reflect on the following questions:

- Are categories relevant to your work missing from the list?
- Are there any categories you feel are irrelevant to your career progress and development? Justify your responses.
- Where are the gaps/weaknesses in your professional network?
- Make a realistic list of network contacts you would like to have and indicate what advantage you believe you would gain from them. What can you do to develop these contacts?
- How much do you know about the professional networks of the people in your network? Would you be able to tap into these other networks, perhaps by offering to share network information?
- Having assembled your list of contacts in your network can you think of possible projects/partnerships that bring together members of the network who you have not grouped with before?
- Are you up to date with contact information about all your network contacts? How do you keep in touch with the members of your professional network?
- What sources of information are you aware of to help expand your network: for example, industry directories, trade magazines, associations?
- Do you participate in any online social networks? How does this participation support your career? Have you investigated any social networks other than the one(s) you currently participate in?

Make it count!

Now that you have made the lists and circles, create a LinkedIn account with a profile and connect with at least the first 20 people. Begin with two people you know well and ask for feedback on your profile before going any further.

This resource was contributed by Michael Hannan (Adjunct Professor with Southern Cross University) and Dawn Bennett (Bond University).