

Will the rise of online social networking mean the demise of face-to-face interaction?

By Kyle Bumgardner

Due to the nature of my work in interactive marketing, I spend a significant amount of time online in online social networking activities. And I frequently participate in traditional networking meetings where my colleagues and customers gather to exchange conversation and business cards.

So does the emphasis on “new school” online social networking make “old school” face-to-face gatherings less important? Not at all; in fact, the rise of online social networking is revealing opportunities to make in-person meetings more effective and meaningful. It is more relevant to consider how to do both better.

Truly effective business networking involves the acquisition and cultivation of influential connections. It is a way to fill your pool of resources from which you can draw opportunities.

The beauty of using online social networking sites is that it can be a highly effective use of resources and if done well, can strengthen and extend your brand and lay the foundation for business relationships.

But virtual networking is only the foundation; personal face-to-face interaction is still an important part of building business relationships that will yield the results you desire.

Therefore, it is important to think about how you are going to meet the people you need to meet, connect them with others and build a strong network to support your success in business. Here are some suggestions for getting the most out of your virtual and in-person networking efforts.

Have a plan. Think about with whom you need to connect and where those people gather online and offline. Narrow down your online networking activities to those sites that truly give you opportunities for connection. Develop a strategy for working the room at in-person networking events, including who you want to meet, and how you will start and politely exit conversations.

Use good communication skills. All networking, regardless of whether it’s online or in-person, is based on good communication techniques. The first step is a concise and interesting introduction. Online, this may take the form of your profile, which should be carefully crafted and complete. In fact, I’m a firm believer that online networking is an all or nothing proposition. You should create a complete and consistent online profile or don’t make one at all.

Virtual and in-person networking done well is a conversation. That means connecting with individuals by paying attention to what they’re saying and what they’re posting. As you meet people at an event, give each speaker your undivided attention and acknowledge the message. During online and offline exchanges, ask questions and

provide feedback. Be engaged and collect sufficient information so that you can reconnect and continue the conversation.

Continue to build and strengthen your network. Reconnect regularly with individuals within your network and keep the connection strong and relevant. Be a matchmaker and make sure that people who are important to you get to meet the people they want to meet. Virtual networking makes it easy to introduce them to one another and face-to-face networking can solidify that relationship.

Kyle Bumgardner is Director of Business Development for online marketing agency WebsiteBiz and frequent contributor to www.MarketerInsight.com. He can be reached at 704-338-1794 or visit www.WebsiteBiz.com for more information.