



IMPROVING YOUR SOCIAL AND BUSINESS NETWORKING

Social networking is not a new phenomenon - people have been meeting together for centuries as a way of expanding their friendships, increasing their sense of community, and establishing new business relationships. And even in the last half century neighborhood or city-based networking organizations have arisen such as the Lions, Kiwanis, and Elks clubs along with those dedicated to pure networking like Business Networking International and LeTip. But it wasn't until a website called sixdegrees was created a few years ago that online networking started to take off - sure chat rooms and listservs had existed in the pre-1995 days but there were never resources online dedicated exclusively to networking. And while sixdegrees sold off their company's assets to other online upstarts, the networking craze had begun. Depending on where you look, there are potentially hundreds of websites where one can network, separated out by interest, industry, and geography and whether the networking interest is for business or personal reasons.

For more business networking, there are 4 primary sites individuals use to expand their network and ultimately their income. The granddaddy of them all is craigslist - a San Francisco-based warehouse of local community news, classifieds, dating options, and job listings started by Craig Newmark that has content specific to the top metropolitan regions in the US. It's a popular site and useful for many things - as ebay found out when they recently purchased a 25% share. ecademy is a UK-based site created by the uber-networker Thomas Power. ecademy requires membership and is set up for pure networking, particularly on a worldwide basis. The site also enables blogging, industry-specific content and chats, and is enabled for heavy-duty networking with known and unknown associates. Ryze is a site focused on business to consumer networking and provides a venue to create a community around your business and personal interests - unfortunately, Ryze use is not regulated too well so the connections and content often related to business opportunities, MLM deals, and value-less connections. LinkedIn is the current disputed leader in the US and worldwide due to its ease of use, practical benefit, and value added features including providing a testimonial for someone you know, passing along requests for connections, job listings, and easy networking with those with similar interests.

Regardless of which site you decide to use, pick one initially and commit to a week or month of consistent participation in the community and decide how you might benefit the work or personal lives of others. As with everything else in life, you get out of it what you put into it - so think both of how you can benefit yourself and others as you participate.

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