



Influencers in the Field

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Building Bridges: The Transformative Power of Networking

As an industry leader in program administration and affinity marketing, we at Gallagher Affinity are intimately familiar with the benefits of networking at both the company and employee level. For years, we've made valuable professional connections, gained skilled talent and even acquired clients through our regular attendance at in-person industry events, digital workshops, webinars and more.

Networking is a valuable skill that allows you to access new employment opportunities, enhance your reputation by increasing awareness of your profile and build valuable relationships that can lead to powerful collaborations.

Regarding your brand, networking can help you strategically express your value by spreading the word about what sets you apart, clarifying your professional goals and attracting new projects or job opportunities that align with your skills. By building relationships with communities or noted individuals — such as a higher-up responsible for determining who gets promotions or an influential colleague with connections to another department — you can gain valuable endorsements that help you achieve your goals.

The benefits of networking are real: [According to a paper by the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis](#), better-connected employees who take advantage of networking, "...climb the job ladder faster and recover more quickly if they fall." It's also believed these workers pass along better referrals, benefitting their network. In a 2025 survey by [Networking Nation](#), 28% of workers cited professional connections as the most helpful job search strategy, second only to personal connections at 32%.

Taking the Work Out of Networking

When the relationships you build today can help you determine the opportunities of tomorrow, it's essential to take advantage of networking opportunities, both in-person and in the digital world.

Here are some ways you can integrate networking into your professional life:

- **Attend industry events** – Industry events, such as trade shows, conferences and forums, present powerful opportunities to make your name known while gaining valuable connections. Bring your business cards, an elevator pitch regarding your credentials, a full social battery and a way to keep track of the people you've met — either by taking down their information manually or collecting business cards in return. Keeping a QR code on your phone that people can easily scan to save your information is a great way to come across as a well-prepared professional.
- **Join a professional association or sponsor organization** – The personal and professional benefits of joining an association are multifaceted. When it comes to networking, you'll automatically have access to hundreds or even thousands of like-minded professionals. Associations commonly foster opportunities for connection and career advancement, such as networking events, plus other ways to get involved, like volunteerism and advocacy days.
- **Get connected on social media** – Today's digital age makes it easier than ever to connect with people. With a robust social media presence on sites like LinkedIn, you can stay current with evolving industry trends and raise your profile at the same time. You can network on social media by joining groups, making one-on-one connections through individual outreach and sharing your own insights regarding your profession. Remember, whatever types of content you decide to publish, whether blogs or articles, it has to be professional. Avoid crude language, politics, religion and other non-work-related topics or content.
- **Find (and learn from) a mentor** – Mentors are experienced career professionals who have seen it all — and, even if they haven't, they can lend you some valuable advice. Because of this, mentors are the perfect addition to any networking effort. Seasoned professionals can also pair up with those younger to learn more about new technologies and trends. Find potential mentors at the workplace, at industry events and online. Start your mentor search by sending them a short, professional email with what you admire about their work or career, your own background, a request to meet and some details about what you'd like to get out of the relationship.

With these tips, you can not only integrate networking into your daily professional life but also become effective at it.

AI Content

Additionally, the evolution of artificial intelligence (AI) has yielded cutting-edge digital tools for networking aficionados, ranging from algorithm-driven networking platforms to programs that help you tailor your communication approach with new connections. Two of these tools include:

- **Crystal** – Making the first move is tricky, especially if you're trying to net a new professional connection or mentor. Crystal makes meaningful connections easy by analyzing public data to provide insights into people's communication styles.
 - **Lunchclub** – Get matched for one-on-one meetings with professionals who align with your career goals. Lunchclub uses AI and machine learning to connect users with shared interests and objectives. With weekly networking sessions and options for virtual or in-person meetings, you can quickly craft meaningful professional relationships.
- Look to your preferred networking platform for AI-powered tools as well. LinkedIn — the world's largest professional networking platform — now offers several AI-enabled features that can make it easier to connect with others and find the job opportunity of your dreams. Primarily for LinkedIn Premium and Recruiter-level accounts, users can now receive:
- **Smart connection suggestions** that use your existing professional network, profile and activity to recommend people you should connect with.
 - **AI-assisted messaging tools** that help craft and personalize your message, improving response rates.
 - **Recommendations on how to improve engagement and visibility** on posts through content optimization features.
 - **Help finding your dream job** through job and opportunity matching assistance that aligns with your skills, work history and network activity.

The Future of Networking

To some, exchanging handshakes and business cards represents the antiquated past of networking in the face of an evolving digital future.

During the pandemic, virtual events provided a safe and reliable way for professionals to connect, learn and network. With evidence of their successes — and massive financial savings in travel, accommodations, meals and so forth per attendee — online workshops, webinars and virtual conferences have surged, providing a valuable and convenient way for people to connect regardless of their schedules and geographic location.

There are some downsides to digital networking, however. Try to avoid the following:

- **Generic messaging** – When you network, you want to make a genuine connection. Inauthentic or generic statements can fall flat due to their lack of depth. When networking, especially online, make sure you're showing genuine interest and engaging meaningfully by sharing your professional insight or relevant expertise.
- **Screen fatigue** – Also known as digital eye strain, this irritating eye condition occurs after too much exposure to digital screens, such as computers, phones and tablets. Screen fatigue can affect you mentally and physically, leading to an inability to focus, headaches and irritability — all negative feelings that can impede your ability to make a positive impression while networking.
- **Imbalanced interactions** – Despite the popularity of digital tools, the human element can't be fully replicated through a screen. Face-to-face interactions continue to foster meaningful connections and trust, not only through your words but also by building on non-verbal cues that can only be experienced in person. Even if you're an avid student of our digital future, make sure you attend some in-person events so you can broaden your exposure and keep your people skills sharp.

Networking is a valuable way to raise your profile and make powerful industry connections you can use to your advantage. Whether you're seeking to collaborate on a project, gain an outside expert opinion or land the employment opportunity of your dreams, networking provides vital connections that can help make these goals easier to achieve.

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