

New Business Networking

How to Effectively Grow Your Business Network Using On-line and Off-line Methods



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New Business Networking

How to Effectively Grow Your Business Network Using Online and Offline Methods

DAVE DELANEY



800 East 96th Street, Indianapolis, Indiana 46240 USA

New Business Networking

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About the Author

Dave Delaney is a recognized leader, consultant, and speaker on digital marketing, social media strategy, and business networking.

Delaney began his career in marketing, promotions, and publicity in Toronto, Ontario, Canada working in performing arts publicity and marketing, newspaper promotions, and broadcast television marketing. In Nashville, Tennessee, his career switched to technology-focused companies where he managed digital marketing efforts focusing on social media strategy and execution.

He hosted one of the first parenting podcasts from 2005–2008, and he has been blogging for nearly a decade.

Dave co-founded two annual unconferences, PodCamp Nashville and BarCamp Nashville. He has also launched two monthly networking events, Nashcocktail and Geek Breakfast. The latter now has chapters across the United States, Canada, South Africa, and Australia.

In July 2012, Delaney was selected by *Billboard Magazine* as a digital marketing expert to follow. Dave Delaney has appeared in technology stories in *USA Today*, *Billboard Magazine*, *Globe & Mail, Nashville Business Journal, The Tennessean*, and *Mashable*.

Delaney frequently speaks at private events, functions, and public conferences. Engagements include South by Southwest Interactive, Social Media Club Nashville, American Marketing Association Nashville, Interlogix Partners Conference, Killer Tribes, Explore, PodCamp Toronto, BarCamp Nashville, and PodCamp Nashville.

Dedication

It took less than a millisecond for me to know who this book is dedicated to: Heather. My wife and best friend. Your belief, encouragement, patience, love, and support knows no bounds. Sam and Ella, this book is also for you. I hope it helps guide you through your careers, but for now go back to playing and being silly. You will have plenty of time to be grown-ups later. I love you three with all of my heart.

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Do Your Homework

Oh, no! What did I do? I helped my wife, Heather, load up all our belongings and our 3-month-old daughter and I4-month-old son to move down to Tennessee from Toronto. I don't know anyone down there. I don't have a job lined up, and I have no one to help me land on my feet. Okay, Delaney. It's time to get serious.

We stored our belongings and moved in with my inlaws in Jackson, Tennessee. It was up to me to network intensively so that we could eventually make the move from my in-law's home in Jackson to our own home in Nashville.

I spent the bulk of my days in Jackson at a local coffee shop with free Wi-Fi. As many early entrepreneurs will agree, coffee shops with free Wi-Fi are essential to growing a business. Of course, the caffeine helps, too. Without a great coffee shop to go to, it's easy to get distracted by family or a roommate at home.

I researched job openings in all the regular places online: Monster.com, CareerBuilder.com, HotJobs.com, and Craigslist.com. These sites are good for finding some positions, but they are not optimal for everyone. I was getting nowhere, growing frustrated, and contemplating my career thus far.

In Toronto, I had built my career in the marketing industry. When we left Toronto, I was working in marketing and promotions for CanWest Media Works—specifically, Global Television. I'll tell you more about how I ended up at one of Canada's largest television networks in Chapter 2, "It Starts with a Coffee."

I knew I wanted to work in marketing for a media company in Nashville, but I could not find open positions listed on the job sites for these types of companies. I knew I would have to find another way. I realized that to find a job in Nashville, I would have to learn everything I could about the appropriate companies and people there. As you read my story, think about where you want to be. Take a moment to jot down some ideas.

GEEKING OUT SINCE 1984

Back in 1984, I ran a bulletin board system on my Commodore 64. I was a kid getting a true taste of the future of online communication. I was always excited to connect with people online. That screeching sound of a dial-up modem still delights me to this day.

In 1999, I started a social dating site in Galway, Ireland, called Spotted Galway. It was similar to the "Sightings" sections of many alternative weekly papers. The concept was simple: You saw someone you fancied at a pub, school, or club, and you left a message trying to connect with them. It was fascinating to watch users log in and use the service. I had thousands of regular users. I ended up selling the service to a British company when we moved back to Toronto.

From 2005 until 2008, Heather and I started one of the first parenting podcasts called "Two Boobs and a Baby." The popular Internet radio show was a big success. Each week, we would share our trials and tribulations from becoming first-time parents and soon second-time. We had a fantastic group of dedicated listeners who frequently posted comments on our blog and in our parenting forums. Our podcast chronicled our early years as parents, and even our move from Toronto to Tennessee in 2007.

I have always been interested in building community and connecting online. The Internet has given us the freedom to create amazing content and share and shape it openly. We live in a time when we can easily research the companies and people we want to connect with. Branding ourselves online is a perfect way to get the ball rolling.

It occurred to me that I had been blogging about marketing and culture since 2004. I realized that a blog was going to be a key way for me to do my homework about who and what was waiting for me in Nashville. I often tell students that they should start a blog before they graduate, because they are being taught and creating valuable information that is worth sharing. By starting a blog, you establish yourself.

When I first moved to Tennessee in January 2007, and started job hunting, I launched a blog called "New Media Nashville." As I mentioned, the purpose was to educate myself about Nashville's new media space. This included traditional media like print, radio, and television, but it also included new media like blogs, social networks, and podcasts. I needed to do extensive research to find the people and companies I wanted to connect with in my job hunt. I shared my findings on my blog to not only record my research, but to also establish myself in the community.

I spent countless hours researching local blogs, newsgroups, forums, newspapers, radio, and television stations. Google was my really good friend as I discovered stories related to Nashville's new media community.

Research was key to writing about Nashville's new media market on New Media Nashville. Keeping in mind that I didn't know a soul, I realized it would be best to learn about the companies I wanted to work for first. Researching the people I needed to connect with would be next, followed by local events I should attend.

I began with a simple spreadsheet to help me keep track of my networking. My downloadable spreadsheet can be found at http://bit.ly/NBNsimpledb. Yours doesn't have to be complicated. Mine wasn't. I suggest the following sections:

First Name

Last Name

Email

Company Name

Company Address

Company URL

Twitter

Facebook

LinkedIn

How Can I Help Them?

How Can They Help Me?

Meeting Status

Outcome

Follow-Up

Not only did I learn a lot about Nashville, but I began to get my name out to people in the community before I had even moved there. By blogging about Nashville, I was learning about the companies and people I wanted to meet. Blogging isn't for everyone, but having your space on the Web is. In Chapter 3, "Your Home on the Web Needs More Than a Welcome Mat," I'll write more about how to carve your space on the Web.

It was from writing my blog and having my place on the Web for potential employers to check me out that I found a full-time job (more about this in Chapter 2). However, the job didn't come until after I had spent plenty of time in face-toface networking. Meeting people and growing your network is key to finding work, new clients, investors, and anyone else who will help you gain control over your career. An important bonus to actively growing your network is the friendships that occur. Without doing the work of finding interesting people, your paths may never cross otherwise.

Job Tips

Whether you are looking for a new job, graduating from college, finding investors for your start-up, or seeking clients for your business, you must know who is out there, or you are a ship without a sail. Begin by researching the companies that you want to work for or do business with.



Don't settle on every company with an opening. By researching the companies, you can choose the ones that have the best cultures, benefits, people, products, and services that fit your style. You will spend at least 40 hours a week with the company you end up working with, so do your homework.

There are a number of resources that you can tap into to discover the companies around you:

- Your local area Chamber of Commerce is a good starting point. An array of different businesses all support chambers, many of which are publicly available on the chamber's site.
- Trade associations list businesses that are specific to an industry. The United States alone has more than 7,600 trade associations. Wikipedia lists many of them at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_industry_ trade_groups_in_the_United_States.

- Check out small business associations. The U.S. Small Business Administration (www.sba.gov/) is a good resource. Also see the National Federation of Independent Business at www.nfib.com/.
- Look at who sponsors local events you are interested in. Once you find ones you want to explore, take note of who the sponsors are. Sponsors sponsor for a reason. They want to hear from you.
- Hoovers.com is a massive database of company and industry information. Portions are behind a paywall, but the free search is worth using to learn more about the companies you are interested in.
- Search for articles about the companies and your industry in your local paper and online.
- Read trade publications.
- Ask your friends and family for their recommendations.
- Google the industry you want to work in and the city you live in. For example: "advertising agency + Nashville."
- Visit your library, and ask a librarian for help with your quest to compile a list of advertising agencies in Nashville.
- Search for related groups and businesses on LinkedIn. You can find groups under the navigation bar. From there, choose Groups You May Like, or do a deeper search using Groups Directory. I will explain this further in Chapter 4, "Grow Your Network Before You Need It: LinkedIn."
- Attend local events related to your industry. I will elaborate on how to find these events in a moment.

Take note of the companies you want to work for or do business with, and add them to your spreadsheet. Your next step is to determine who it is you need to meet with at each company. If you want to work for the company, you need to meet the human resources manager or a senior-level person. If you want to do business with the company, you should try to learn who manages the department or company so you can speak to the decision maker.

Research People

Upon creating your dream list of companies in your spreadsheet, you will want to research who it is you should be meeting. For example, if you are seeking a marketing position, it's essential to find out who the chief marketing officer or marketing manager is.

If the company is publicly traded, it should be relatively easy to locate the name of the person you want to meet on the company website. If the company is private, you need to be more creative to track down the name. LinkedIn is a valuable resource for researching who does what in each company. Search for the company on LinkedIn, and select Employees. Then flip through the results until you find the appropriate person to contact. If you are already actively using LinkedIn, you may discover that you are connected to the person you want to meet. I'll write much more on LinkedIn in Chapter 4.

If you're a student, you probably have access to search engines like Lexis Nexus and Hoovers, which provide additional information that you likely won't find from a typical Google search. Hoovers often includes a list of senior managers for firms, annual earnings, and the company address. You are paying plenty for your education, so use the free tools and resources that come along with the package. Ask your campus librarian or research assistant for help. Non-students can also use Lexis Nexus' and Hoovers' basic search functions.

Search Google and the company website for press releases. These releases often include quotes from senior employees. Take note of how the publicist's email appears. You can usually find this format, so guessing the person's email is relatively easy.

Use the aforementioned spreadsheet, and be sure to include email addresses when possible. Most company email addresses are made up of a person's first name initial and last name @ the company name DOT com. For example, mine would be ddelaney@abusiness.com. Alternatively, the email address may be davedelaney@abusiness.com. If the company is small, it may simply be dave@abusiness.com.

You can find the people at the companies you need to connect with in several ways:

- Search the company name in Followerwonk (Followerwonk.com). This locates the name in any Twitter bio.
- Use LinkedIn to see who the current employees are at a company. From the careers page, choose to View All Employees.
- Check company press releases.
- Visit company websites, and look for the employee list or contact page.
- Read the company blog, and see who writes the content.
- Use the phone. Call the company, and ask who the marketing manager or head of human resources is.

The following sections describe other ideas that can help with your search.

Rapportive

One of the best free tools currently available is Rapportive. Rapportive is a social plug-in that you can add to your Gmail account. Once it is installed, a preview of the person you are emailing magically appears on the right side of your screen.

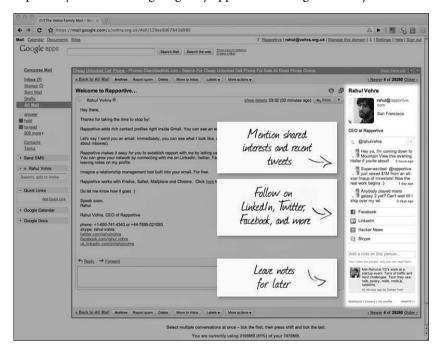


Figure 1.1 Preview a person on Rapportive.com.²

The Rapportive preview pulls information available from the person's email address. This usually includes the person's LinkedIn photo and account, Twitter tweets, and Facebook profile. It is a fantastic way to know who you are writing or replying to before clicking Send.

Rapportive is especially helpful when you are guessing a person's email address. It is also nice for getting to know someone a little more before you write the message. In fact, using it with LinkedIn may reveal that you are already connected through a mutual contact, and you can request an introduction instead of cold-emailing your contact.

By clicking in the Rapportive window's LinkedIn area, you can arrive directly on the person's LinkedIn account. You will see right away if you have any contacts who may know him. This is a perfect opportunity for you to learn a little more about this person and request an introduction from your contact.

At this point in the homework phase, you should have a good list of people and companies you want to connect with. One good way to meet these people casually is at conferences and events they plan to attend.

Events and Conferences

There is a popular web acronym called IRL, or in real life. This is an important term that I will mention repeatedly throughout this book. What I have learned through my many years connecting online is that online relationships become much more solidified once you have met a person IRL.

If you spend as much time as I do online, you are probably already seeking more IRL interactions. I call them the 3 Hs: high-fives, handshakes, and hugs. The feeling of meeting people in person for the first time is an incredible one, especially when you already know each other from online correspondences.

Back in 2007, I attended the Podcast New Media Expo in Ontario, California. This is where I add a small joke that Ontario, California, is nowhere near as lovely as Ontario, Canada, my home province.

My wife, Heather, and I had launched our successful parenting podcast "Two Boobs and a Baby" a couple of years earlier. Not only did we produce a weekly podcast, but I was subscribed to about 50 other shows. I am still a huge fan of the audio-on-demand format of podcasts. I listen to them more than music or the radio when I am traveling.

One program I listened to frequently was C.C. Chapman's, "Managing the Gray." Each episode of C.C.'s podcast included tips and tools to improve online marketing efforts. It was a great show that I looked forward to each week or two.

Not only did C.C. share valuable information in each episode, but he did it in a positive, inspiring way. His energy and passion for what would later be commonly known as "social media" was contagious.

C.C. and I had communicated through comments on his blog and social networking sites like Twitter, so we did know each other a bit but not very much. When I learned that he would be speaking at Podcast New Media Expo (PNME), I knew that we had to meet in person.

I remember specifically introducing myself to C.C. during one of the conference parties. He instantly produced a massive smile and threw out his arms to give me a hug. What an amazing way to meet a person who you admire and who you had only interacted with online.

The next morning, I attended his "Hey Homefries" breakfast, where I met an energetic group of podcasters. Not only did I get to hang out for breakfast with C.C.,

but I got to meet more incredible podcasting people like Charles Cadenhead, Paige Heninger, Molly Lynn, Ed Roberts, and Matthew Ebel. I also got to catch up with a fellow Canadian podcasting friend, Julien Smith, and met a popular blogger named Chris Brogan. Chris and Julien would later write a New York Times bestselling book, *Trust Agents*. They remain good friends today who have gone on to become leaders in social media marketing.



Figure 1.2 C.C. Chapman's "Hey Homefries" breakfast at PNME 2007. From left, Matthew Ebel, C.C. Chapman, Julien Smith.³

Today I consider C.C. a dear friend. When I asked him about his inspiration for his breakfast event, he explained, "That was so much fun. Of course, I didn't think of it as a networking event. I had a popular podcast and wanted to meet some of my listeners, so I invited everyone to breakfast. Sitting down over a meal is one of the best ways to get to know people, and I'm a huge fan of breakfast. So it was a fit."

By following C.C. on Twitter @cc_chapman, I knew he was going to the party. Are you following the people you want to meet on Twitter? Author Mitch Joel coined the term "permission-based stalking" when describing Twitter. I have always found it to be an appropriate and humorous definition. Had I not been following C.C., I would not have known where he would be that evening, and we would not have met in person. This meeting led to the breakfast that in turn introduced me to many other amazing people.

In Chapter 9, "If You Build It, They Will Come: Organizing Events," I'll talk more about how to organize your own events like C.C. did for his "Hey Homefries" breakfast. For now, let's talk about how to research the events that you should attend to connect and grow your network.

Finding Events

Not only is networking alone in your office ineffective, it is also kind of sad. You won't get far growing your network by sitting by yourself in your house. You need to get off your chair and into the world where other people are.

Some great sources of events are LinkedIn, Meetup, Facebook, Eventbrite, your local chamber of commerce, and newspapers. Let's explore some options and then talk more about conferences in general.

LinkedIn Events

One valuable feature of LinkedIn that many people miss is the Events section. Once logged in, you can navigate to the Events listing to find a variety of conferences that you may be interested in attending. After all, part of the value of any conference is the networking that takes place outside the auditorium, in the halls, cafes, and restaurants.

LinkedIn Events provides a list of seminars and conferences that are appropriate for you based on your professional network and LinkedIn profile. The algorithm actually selects events it thinks you will enjoy based on your job title and other key words used in your profile. I am always impressed with the quality of the results. If you don't see what you like, you can take it a step further by using the Events search engine.

A key feature of LinkedIn Events is that it reveals who in your network is attending the event. You can also see a list of other people who plan to attend. Decide who you want to meet during the event. Remember that you should always consider how you can help them first. Nobody likes a pushy sales guy, so never approach networking this way.

LinkedIn Professional is LinkedIn's paid service. You can see everyone who has been viewing your profile, which is a nice way to see who has found you. You can also see analytics to give you more information about how you appear in LinkedIn's search results. Paid users can use the InMail service to contact the people they want to meet. If you use LinkedIn's free service, you can also see a partial list of who has been viewing your profile and send five free InMails.

Beyond this, take advantage of Google. Simply search for the person and the name of their company. You will likely find a Twitter or Facebook profile associated

with the person. I will talk more about connecting on other social networking sites shortly. Add the contacts you want to meet to your spreadsheet. You will be using this to keep track, so don't forget to put it to good use.

It is expensive to travel to different cities to attend large conferences. Sometimes the best people to network with can be walking distance away. Local events can be a more cost-effective way to meet people closer to home.

Meetup

Meetup.com is a popular social networking site that was established in 2002 as a portal for finding and promoting local events.

Today there are 9.5 million members worldwide, with 92,000 monthly local groups based on 90,000 topics. Meetup can be found in 45,000 cities, with 280,000 organized meetups. Not bad, eh? The topics of the meetups range vastly, from book clubs and design groups to hiking and technology groups.

In early 2007, before officially moving to Nashville, I attended a meetup group about podcasting in Nashville. It was nice to connect with other locals who had a similar interest. Networking works well when you already have something in common. Like LinkedIn Events, Meetup usually shows the list of other attendees, so you can connect before the event.

The meetups do not always have to be specific to business networking for professional opportunities to present themselves. A key point to networking is to connect with a community of like-minded individuals. In Nashville, for example, Kelly Stewart started a meetup group for people interested in hiking in 2006. Today the group has over 5,000⁴ members and is extremely active. Regardless of the group topic, relationships are built, and oftentimes business opportunities arise.

Actively networking can be exhausting, so it is important to choose wisely when deciding which events to attend. I have found that actual attendees versus registered attendees for free events is usually around 50%. If an event listed on Meetup has 40 people registered, I would expect 20 to actually show up. Paid events tend to have a higher conversion, because you lose your money if you buy a ticket and don't attend.

When you look through attendees of a Meetup event, they may include their social profiles. Check them out on Facebook, Twitter, and Flickr to learn a little about them. How can you help them? How can they help you? Add them to your list, and contact them before the event.

Let's say you see someone who is attending with a Twitter account. Review his latest tweets and Twitter bio. If you see something interesting, reply and follow him. You may want to add that you noticed he is attending the event and that you look forward to meeting him.

Facebook Events

There is no shortage of events listed on Facebook. Assuming you have a fair amount of friends, you should be able to see the upcoming events they are planning to attend. This may be a good reason to reach out to friends you haven't seen in a while. Find out where they will be by visiting www.facebook.com/events/list.

Use Facebook to ask your friends about the events you should be attending. What events are they planning to attend and why? Sometimes all it takes is asking the question.

Eventbrite

Eventbrite is best known as an online ticketing solution for event organizers. Not only is it excellent for this purpose, it is also a great resource of local events. Simply visit the Find Events section of the site and enter your city. Eventbrite then searches all public events coming up in your town. If you are searching for something to do tonight, Eventbrite also has a handy mobile app that can help you find events. Just go to www.eventbrite.com/eventbriteapp/.

Eventbrite uses Facebook Connect. By choosing to connect to Facebook, you will see your friends who are attending the events. This is a good opportunity to ask them more about why they are going or what they hope to get from the event.

Don't let an event frighten you if you don't know anyone attending. The purpose of networking is to connect with your contacts, but it is also to grow your network. You won't meet anyone new if you just stick with the people you know.

Chamber of Commerce and Other Sources

You will also find an array of local events listed in your local newspaper, alt. weeklies, Eventful.com, and chamber of commerce sites. Do some digging, and you are sure to find some great local events to attend.

Finding Conferences

Conferences are wonderful ways to connect with lots of people at one time. Ask your friends and colleagues which conferences they attend and why. Think about the areas you are most interested in to help you develop your career or business.

I have always enjoyed my time at South by Southwest (SXSW) Interactive, which has become the social media maven festival of the year. SXSW is an exception to many other conferences because of its sheer size. Each year approximately 25,000 people gather in Austin, Texas, in March to celebrate everything related to the Internet, from tech start-up entrepreneurs to video game enthusiasts.

Find the conference that is most appropriate for you, and do some research. If the event tickets are for sale on Eventbrite, you may be able to see who else will be there. Many events have a Twitter hashtag associated with them. This is a great way to track the conversation before, during, and after the event.

USE TWITTER SEARCH TO CONNECT BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER A CONFERENCE

Twitter hashtags are specific words used to track conversations on Twitter. By using Twitter's search function, you can search for hashtags specific to a conference. In the South by Southwest case, search for #SXSW or #SXSWi so you can meet and follow people discussing the conference. Don't forget to include the hashtag yourself when you are tweeting about an upcoming conference so other people can find you.

My experience is mainly with technology and marketing conferences, but not every type of conference attendee will use hashtags. However, they still may converse online about the conference. You can also set up and save a Twitter search for the conference name. I talk more about Twitter in Chapter 5.

Connecting with Others

Take note of the sponsors of events and conferences. They are sponsoring because they want their brand out there. They want to develop new business and possibly hire new staff. Why not contact the sponsors directly to find out more about their business? If you are interested, the sponsors will be more than willing to schedule a meeting during the conference. You may not get a job or a new client from the meeting, but you will be meeting someone new who works in an industry you are interested in. This is key to growing your network. Don't go looking for a job. Go because you genuinely want to learn more.

Connect with event organizers. They will be very busy as the event grows close. If you can introduce yourself early enough, you can learn more about how and why the event was created. The event organizer knows many people in the industry, so he would be a perfect person to connect with. Offer to help him promote the conference across your social channels, and ask him how you can help make it amazing.

Not all events and conferences are created equal. Consider this when deciding where to spend your time and money. If a local event has an open registration list and you only see a few people attending, it may not be worth your time. Also, if the event is for a topic that you are not really interested in, it may be worth reconsidering. Use your time wisely.

Try to connect with as many people as possible before the conference or event. By introducing yourself and establishing a relationship online, the meetings that you

schedule will be that much more productive and fun. Networking is a two-way street, so think about how you can help others.

Going with the Flow

Go with the flow at conferences. While I encourage you to do your best to preschedule meetings during conferences, I also recommend going with the flow. Some of my best memories from conferences were made during spur-of-themoment gatherings.

One favorite story was during Gnomedex in Seattle in 2008. I was walking out of the conference center with a couple of friends when a graffitied school bus pulled up. The hosts invited us to hop in the Magic Bus so we could take a ride to a local art gallery.

The bus was filled with some of my favorite technology geeks in the world, like Dave Olsen, Chris Suspect, Amber Case, Kris Krug, Jacob Stewart, Alex Williams, Nathan Taylor, Pete Grillo, Scott Maentz, and Marcus Whitney.

The bus ride was a hilarious adventure through the side streets of Seattle. Most of us had no idea where we were going. We were too busy laughing at the absurdity of it all. Some of the people who were on the bus are still friends today. And it was all from going with the flow on a magic bus.

Another similar experience was during SXSW in 2007. I ran into Scott Monty, who would later become the social media manager for Ford Motor Company. Scott and I had been friends online for a while, but we had never met in person. We had just received our swag bags and badges and were looking for something to do. We both checked our phones and saw a tweet from the incredibly gifted cartoonist and author, Hugh MacLeod, also known as @gapingvoid on Twitter. Hugh suggested people join him for a pint on the patio of a bar across the street from the convention center.

Scott and I agreed that it was a fine idea indeed. We ventured across the street and joined a small group of Hugh's friends for a cold one. We then decided to see how many people we could attract to the bar from all of us tweeting our impromptu tweet-up. Within 30 minutes, we had about 50 people on the patio conversing excitedly about what SXSW had in store. Who knew that some of the people I met that day back in 2007 on the patio would still be friends?

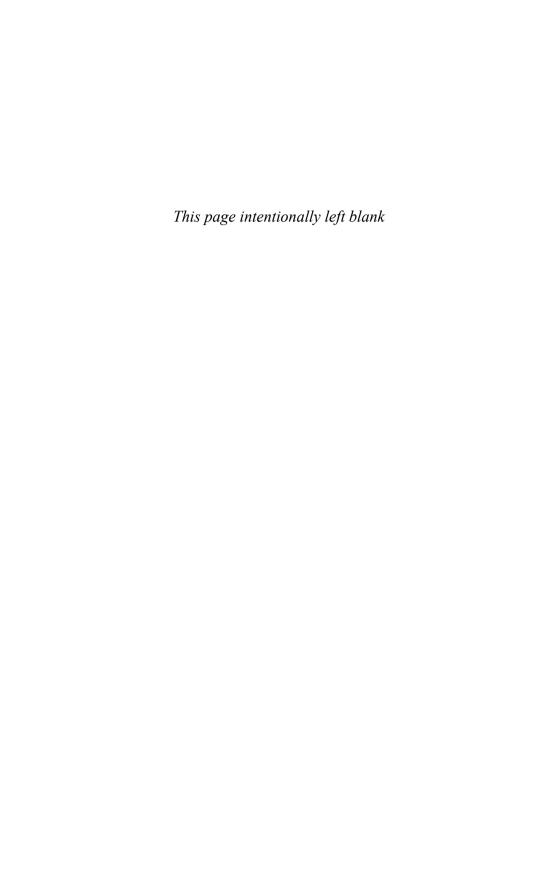
Social Marketing

Social networking is all about building relationships with real people—not just brands, but the people behind the brands. The best businesses in social marketing understand this. They empower their employees to represent their brands across social channels.

That is the thing about networking. We are actively trying to connect with like-minded people. Sure, we are looking to grow our businesses and careers, but the importance of human relationships goes deeper than this. By attending events and meeting new friends or online friends in person, we are growing our professional networks, but we are also making our lives richer.

Endnotes

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- 2. http://rapportive.com/about
- 3. Photo by Dave Delaney
- 4. http://celiasankar.com/blog/2011/11/16/meetup-ceo-talks-about-doing-what-you-love/



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