

Momentum

Playbook 21

Socially Connect and Thrive

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Playbook 21:

Socially Connect and Thrive

How One Comment Led to a Lead

Years ago, I started dabbling in LinkedIn groups and joined my Indiana University Alumni group. I was interested in what other alums all over the world were doing and surely, I thought, some of them run their own businesses or marketing departments.

A discussion had started about branding your business, so I decided to post a comment – my very first one in the group – to offer some advice while at the same time showcasing my expertise.

I kid you not. From that lone comment, a Marketing Director in Chicago reached out to me for a project proposal.

Literally five minutes of my time had resulted in a new sales opportunity.

This is the power of online networking. But it's not the only way to do it. Read on.....

A Whole New World

Online networking, or *social networking* is something business owners never even worried about even just ten years ago. If you were doing business with someone you'd never met, it was usually because you had a referral or a connection to that person.

Now the marketing game has changed.

Authors and those with anonymous fan bases have dealt with this squishy kind of marketing for a long time. But now they have channels to directly interact with people they've never met.

So do you. You can make connections and share your expertise with anyone, anywhere. This opens up many more markets to you!

The beauty of social networking is that you're not limited to finding your ideal clients right in your own backyard. You can find them anywhere in the world.

As I said, the game has changed. And you need to learn how to play it.

What is Social Networking?

Social networking is defined as “the use of dedicated websites and applications to interact with other users, or to find people with similar interests to oneself.”

I define it as interacting and engaging with online connections (whether you’ve met them offline or not) in a variety of forums that can include:

- Online groups, forums and communities (Facebook, LinkedIn or a private/paid website community)
- Email discussion lists (for example, Google groups where you mostly communicate via email)
- Social media followers and fans
- I would also include people you’ve never met in person who reach out to do business with you via email.

If you’re connecting with people virtually, I term that social networking. It may not be an “official definition” but many of the same rules apply.

Online groups or discussion forums work in many different ways. They can literally be parked on a site (like a LinkedIn group or a proprietary website) or they can simply be email groups. All groups or forums focus on a specific interest topic or industry.

Some online groups are run by a list moderator and are “invitation only” or require approval before you can join. Many are formed after you pay for a class or program. Some are moderated by someone to keep the flow of conversation organized (and civil!)

P.S. You’re already in at least one online group with MOMENTUM!

You could be networking with folks you’ve met in real life. For example, a professional group called Women in Consulting here in the San Francisco Bay Area moderates a very active LinkedIn group. I’ve met some of those women but not most of them. Vibrant local Meetups also operate this way, with both an offline and online component.

More often than not, you are engaging in social networking with people you’ve never met. But you can get to know them so well, you might just forget!

Why Do It?

Just as with any other marketing tactic, you have to be very clear about why you are doing it. Social networking offers many benefits:

- Boost your visibility
- Open up new markets
- Generate new leads and attract new fans
- Engage your audience
- Establish your thought leadership
- Connect with future partners or collaborators
- Find inspiration, resources and support
- Learn more about your target audience
- Great for introverts! But as per last Playbook, it's healthy and vital to meet in person every now and then.

And...most of the time, it's FREE! At least in hard costs: You do have to spend some of your time on doing this right.

I'm not messing around: I've met some of my dearest and most valuable business colleagues through Twitter, Facebook and in private online forums, some whom I've never met in person, even after all these years. **They've hooked me up with new clients, press, resources, advice, speaking engagements and more.** And for whom I've done the same. I've also hired trusted contractors who "met" me through social media and then reached out with an email. It's amazing how you can create a relationship with someone that can last longer than a transient post.

I met one of my most valued business partners of almost nine years a total of once in real life. And another one, I didn't meet until after almost five years of working together.

Social networking can open doors to new clients, media opportunities, speaking engagements and the support and resources you need to succeed.

For some of you, online groups are not your thing. That's okay. **But know that you are limiting your marketing, collaboration and learning if you don't at least try!**

How to Decide Where to Be

The same rules apply here as they do for the offline groups we discussed last time. Try a few on for size and see how they feel. Spend some time listening and see what the conversations are all about, but also get a feel for the style and vibe. And make sure you are balancing a mix of peer and industry groups with prospect groups.

If you're overwhelmed, remember *The Rule of Three!* Pick up to three forums or networks and get really involved.

Think about what you really need and what you can offer. You may want to join an entrepreneurial group to find support and resources in growing your business. But you may also seek creativity, writing help or support with your financials. If you're a life coach specializing in career development, let's say, maybe you want to join a group about career transition so you can find out about your target audience and network with prospects.

I highly recommend that if you join any program that requires significant investment (like MOMENTUM!) you join the online community. It serves as a way to get further involved and have "skin in the game" so you truly commit to what's going on. This way, you get your money and time's worth. If you are overwhelmed by how many groups this may be, then you are signing up for too many programs!

Netiquette: Social Networking Do's and Don'ts

Ok, so you're going to network online. Hurrah!

But as a hilarious colleague once said years ago: **Don't be an e-Hole.**

Just as with offline networking, online networking has rules about what helps you shine or makes people think you're creepy and gross.

Group/Forum Netiquette:

- 1. DO your homework:** Before you jump into conversations on a brand new group, be sure to read the guidelines carefully and spend some time listening to the conversations. What are people talking about: practical advice or more inspirational support? What is the tone: casual and approachable or stiff and formal? What are some of the most common questions? Who are the most active folks? Who are the troublemakers? This advice is less true for smaller groups to which you've been invited or paid to join, like MOMENTUM.
- 2. DO craft a compelling first post:** Some groups request an introduction post for new members, others do not. Follow the rules. In any case, be thoughtful in your first post. It's your first impression. Always introduce yourself on forums for which you've paid or to which you've been personally invited. Share what you hope to learn AND what you hope to offer. And for the love of Pete, DON'T RAMBLE! We want to get to know you, not read *War and Peace*. On the other hand, don't put so much pressure on yourself in crafting a "first post" that you are paralyzed. When you have a good feel for the group, by all means, jump in!

3. **DON'T use it like email:** If you're in a large public group and posting a question everyone would benefit from or an insightful comment or article great, share away! But if you're only speaking to one or two people, direct message them. Don't use the open forum to say, "Hey, Sally, want to meet for coffee next week?" There's enough clutter on our lives!
4. **DON'T get involved in heated threads:** They can happen very easily, especially in large, public forums. Resist the urge to jump in and make things worse. Chances are these folks are not rational. Trust me on this. You will still be angry and it will just make you feel worse as the attacks start getting directed at you. Walk away.
5. **DO be generous:** Don't just be a "user." Contribute to the community to help it thrive. Find threads where you can share advice, connections or resources. This not only makes you look good, it builds your brand credibility so you start to be known as a giver and an expert. Offer to help so that when you ask for help (and you should, don't be afraid!) others will want to help you.
6. **DON'T sell:** Offer valuable insights and advice and share generously. This will showcase your brand to others within the group and they will check you out, seriously. Don't abuse the forum by constantly pitching, unless you've been given permission to promote your site and work on occasion (as you have in MOMENTUM, because we want to know what you're up to!). You can softly mention some things in your answers to others but be tactful. It's fine to let others know about events or workshops, but make sure you're following the group's rules. They may want you to post that type of info in another location.
7. **DO be polite:** Enough said. Just because you're behind a computer doesn't mean you can pop off on people. Respect others' opinions and disagree if you must with grace and facts, not personal attacks. This is most difficult when others are not polite to you and they seem to *deserve* personal attacks! As Michelle Obama says, "When they go low, we go high!"
8. **DO bring your personality but DON'T forget that things can get lost in translation:** I'm a very sarcastic person but my humor does not always translate well unless you hear me say it. When joining new groups, definitely showcase your personality, use humor, be approachable but be mindful of swearing and caustic comments that can easily be misinterpreted or offensive. At least until the group knows you better.

Online Connection Etiquette:

These netiquette rules apply to communities/sites where you ask permission to connect one-on-one with someone, like LinkedIn or Facebook.

1. **DO write an introduction to the connection request:** I hardly ever accept LinkedIn invites from a stranger unless they take the time to craft a thoughtful introduction as to why they want to connect with me. While it's super easy to just hit that "Connect" button, be sure you give people a reason. This could be as simple as "We know a lot of the same people," "I'm interested in your services," "I really loved your last blog post," or "We're in the same networking group."
2. **DON'T make your first interaction a "sales" interaction:** Invite the person to connect and get to know each other. Read their posts, review their profile. Find ways you can be generous first before actively pitching. *However*, if you are reaching out to connect to someone who's

specifically asked for services, by all means go ahead and sell. For example, recently someone posted on LinkedIn that they were looking for brand strategy help. A friend recommended me so my first interaction with the man was to find out what he needed and share my offerings. This is the only time this is acceptable.

3. **DO immediately connect online with people you met offline:** Don't delay on follow-up. If you've just had a meeting or met someone at a live event, don't delay in connecting with them online by the very next day and reminding them of where you met and why you'd like to stay in touch. Of course, you're off the hook on this if you *don't* want to stay in touch!

Social Media Netiquette:

Man, there are so many rules depending on which network you're using! Some of the same rules above apply here, too. But you also need to bear in mind the specific mores of that platform.

Check out [this article](#), [this one](#) or this [very good one](#) about how to professionally network on social media.

For etiquette on each specific platform (yes, it can be very different!), there are TONS of articles online (make sure to write the year in your search so you don't pull up articles from 2008). Here are some good ones to check out – some of the advice applies to just using the platform for business, but some applies to personal use as well:

[Etiquette for Twitter](#)

[Etiquette for Facebook](#)

[Etiquette for LinkedIn](#)

[Etiquette for Instagram](#) (PS, this one is hilarious!)

[Etiquette for Pinterest](#)

Beyond simple etiquette, if you'd like great specific advice about the types of posts or images that work best for each network, read [Jab, Jab, Jab, Right Hook](#) by Gary Vaynerchuk, subscribe to Savvy Sexy Social's [You Tube channel](#) or follow the [Yes and Yes blog](#) for advice from the fabulous Sarah Von Barga. Especially about Pinterest!

Here are some basic rules on how to play the social networking game:

- **DO follow the 80/20 Rule:** Offer valuable content 80% of the time and promote your offerings 20%. This is where maintaining a blog, podcast or video series can come in handy to promote great content while kinda, sorta promoting yourself as an expert, too. Or even better, 90/10.
- **DO complete your profile:** *Get a professional headshot taken and post a good picture.* I don't want to see a default egg icon or cropped photo of you on vacation in Mexico with a sombrero on your head. Unless it's a pro pic and it's part of your brand as a travel blogger. Complete your bio/profile copy (but only share what you feel comfortable). Properly size your images and profile banners for every social media network you're on. [Here's a handy guide.](#)
- **DO review your privacy settings:** Protect yourself. And review them often as sometimes

updates cause them to revert to a default setting you may not want.

- **DO interact and acknowledge:** Remember way back when we talked about not being on 19 different social media networks and doubling-down on only a few? This is where you'll thank me. Social media is social. Automating your posts with a tool like Hootsuite or Buffer is great, but you have to get in there every now and then. Don't just use it as a billboard to promote your work. Interact. Give shout-outs. Thank people for RT's. Respond to questions. Share other's posts and pins. Comment. Like. Set aside at least 15 minutes a day for this.

Be Generous and Follow Up

This bears so much repeating from our playbook about offline networking, here it is again, slightly altered.

Most people hate networking online because they hate talking about themselves. Fair enough.

But it's not about you. It's about listening and connecting with others, showing empathy. What can you contribute? With whom can you connect someone?

Approach each online group or connection as an exercise in radical generosity.

Your Assignment: Cultivate Your Online Community

Some of this may look familiar from last Playbook, applied to social networking!

Set your intention: What is your goal or intention for online networking? Meet one great new person? Boost your visibility? Find new leads? Gather bookkeeper recommendations? Find an accountability partner? Learn something new? Outline it here:

Find online forums and groups: Conduct a LinkedIn or Facebook group search on areas of interest, based on your goals above. Ask colleagues where they network online. Search through Meetups for those with an active online community. Identify three that seem interesting to you below: _____

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Request new connections: Explore profiles on Facebook, LinkedIn or other social media networks. Look at your friends' contact lists and see if there's anyone to whom you'd like an introduction. Find people in your industry, or prospects who might be a good fit for your offerings. Learn more about them online and then ask to connect (with a personalized note!) Spend 30 minutes doing it this week and then schedule time each month to do this.

But wait, you're not quite done....

Please post your social networking strategy to the Facebook page by Friday. Let's share our online resources, as many of us will be interested in the same ones. Report back on progress or connections in a few weeks' time.

Remember, we are here to encourage you and provide any feedback. If you're like me, often it's fellow collaborators that help me polish my ideas to a glossy sheen.

Again, I'm going to reward you all year long, so don't lose your MOMENTUM: Post it now and keep

that train moving!

One Last Thing...

Just as with offline networking, seek out social networking opportunities where you feel comfortable, can meet the right people and have a good time.

Remember, you just have to find your own authentic, fun way of connecting with people—the *right* people.

I know our last playbook talked about making human, in-person connections. I specifically presented that to you first instead of this one so you wouldn't ignore that lesson by ducking back behind your screen!

Online networking can boost your visibility, open doors and amplify your brand. We live in one of the most amazing times in history where the globe is literally your marketplace and you can communicate with anyone, anywhere.

Use it.

What I'm not saying: Give up your real life to the online world. Ignore the work, your family and the light of the sun and hole up behind your computer. Check your phone and social media profiles every five minutes.

I'm ABSOLUTELY not saying that.

Those who know me well know this is a hot button for me. It is not healthy for us as individuals or society as a whole for people to be connected to their screens and phones 24/7.

In fact, I am a huge proponent of spending less "screen" time and more "life" time: doing digital detoxes and scheduling technology sabbaticals for your friends, family or yourself.

What I *am* saying: Effectively use the time you are online to amplify your message and work.

Connect. Build relationships. Share resources.

Don't do it in a way that overwhelms you, but in a focused, fun way that nourishes you and your business.

Sending virtual hugs,

Maria

Goodies and Inspiration

You've got many links sprinkled throughout this Playbook, so please take a look back through and check them out.

Also, here's a three-part series that leadership coach and networking expert Michelle Tillis-Lederman did on social networking, that include powerful tips for leveraging social networks to build connections:

[Part 1: Facebook](#)

[Part 2: LinkedIn](#)

[Part 3: Twitter](#)

Proceed with caution: Watch [this interview](#) I did for MSNBC's *Your Business* with four tips to protect yourself when doing business with people you meet online. Connection is fabulous. Just be savvy and smart about it.

And before you completely hole up behind your computer and forget how to connect with real humans and yourself...please re-visit the last Playbook, and check out this great idea from filmmaker Tiffany Schlain: [Plan a regular technology shabbat!](#)