

## MAKING CONNECTIONS



# nLine

**Use on-line networking Web sites to expand career opportunities and open doors.**

“IT’S NOT WHAT YOU KNOW, IT’S WHOM YOU KNOW” IS TRUE IN EVERY PROFESSION. Meeting, getting to know, and befriending others is a critical step in advancing your social life or your career. Whether you aim to land a prestigious fellowship, pursue an attending spot at a popular medical center, earn a coveted position in a lucrative private practice, or get invited to present a paper at an upcoming conference, networking can make it happen.

The process of networking is defined as a social activity that forms a connection between people with similar interests who stay in touch for mutual assistance and support. Such initial contacts can occur virtually anywhere—while on rounds, in the staff lounge, at dinner parties, local medical society meetings, on the golf course, or at PTA meetings. However, following up and staying in touch with the people you’ve met is critical to establishing an ongoing relationship—a connection. Over time, such professional relationships can prove extremely useful as you explore career opportunities. Your network may yield a heads-up about a job opening, about the best place to live in the city you’re moving to, or serve as a valuable refer-

ence for a grant. Networking opens doors.

However, there is a difference between overt networking and asking for help from a network of trusted colleagues. Overt, or explicit, networking includes attending public events set up specifically for the purpose of meeting others, handing out business cards, and participating in industry functions, such as seminars or medical society get-togethers. Implicit networking, on the other hand, involves reaching out to trusted connections for help with a professional need. It assumes an already existing set of contacts. Most networking is done by implicit networking—95 percent, in fact—only now it is facilitated by some high tech tools.

Like so many activities, networking has moved on line. Web sites with names like *LinkedIn.com*, *Spoke.com*, *ZeroDegrees.com*, and *Ryze.com* have emerged as places for would-be networkers to mingle. Although the venue may have changed, the process is the same, says Al Lautenslager, a networking ex-

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**Tia Konzer, DO, a psychiatry resident at Sparrow Hospital System in East Lansing, Michigan, expects on-line networking sites like ZeroDegrees to play an important role as she establishes her own practice in a few years. “You can never start too early to develop connections in your own field and elsewhere,” she says.**

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pert and the co-author of *Guerrilla Marketing in 30 Days* (Entrepreneur Press, 2005). “Networking on line is just like off-line networking. You still have to act interested, follow up, establish relationships, make contacts, and provide value,” he says. The difference is in how the initial contact is made.

#### **Joining In**

Some doctors immediately spot the potential value of such sites. John Luo, MD, an assistant professor of psychiatry at the University of California at Los Angeles Neuropsychiatric Institute and Hospital, heard about LinkedIn and Ryze about a year ago and decided to investigate. Luo had already experienced first-hand the power of connections a few years ago when a colleague’s network helped him land

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several job offers. "It comes down to who you know," he says.

With that in mind, Luo turned to LinkedIn for help on two fronts: developing psychiatric contacts in other cities to which he could refer his patients, and locating fellow physicians with a similar interest in medical informatics with whom he could network and socialize. When he did an initial search of the data base, he found about 20 fellow psychiatrists. From that list, he reached

out to a colleague in San Diego and invited him to join the American Association for Technology in Psychiatry (AATP), of which Luo is past president.

Shortly after joining LinkedIn, Luo decided to tap into the site's

✓ **The best way to get started is to complete a personal profile at one or more of the sites. Revealing more information about yourself up front helps improve your networking ability.**

resources in pursuit of donated products to give to AATP scholarship recipients. His goal was to supplement the scholarship funds with examples of the latest technology. After spotting an ingenious collapsible keyboard made by Think

## On-line Professional Outlets

Separate and distinct from Web sites focused on fostering social ties like Friendster and Orkut, Web sites devoted to professional networking and career growth are proliferating. Some of the top ones out there now include:

### LinkedIn.com

One of the most professionally-focused net-working Web sites, *LinkedIn.com* enables connections and offers job listings with the added bonus of telling you how many degrees of separation you are from the poster.

### Ryze.com

Similar to *LinkedIn.com* in its networking approach, *Ryze.com* has the added dimension of live events organized by its on-line "communities." Ryze members have the option to participate totally on line, from afar, or to attend local meetings held by community organizers with a common interest.

### Spoke.com

Networking guru Al Lautenslager perceives

*Spoke.com* to be more of a sales prospecting tool than networking enabler because it is less focused on relationship-building than other sites. But the 24 million contacts available at the site should be enough to get you to investigate for yourself. Chances are good that someone in the Spoke network can make a valuable professional connection for you.

### ZeroDegrees.com

*ZeroDegrees.com* allows you to search for potential contacts by name, title, or keyword and then reach out to them directly by e-mail. You can also supplement your personal profile with testimonials and offer your professional services or know-how here.

### MomMD.com

A hybrid social/professional Web site "connecting women in medicine," *MomMD.com* offers many opportunities for discussion and support among its female participants. The site also has a job board with employment postings and discussion forums where people considering a career in medicine, or who are medical students or residents, can meet and chat with each other.

### Network.monster.com

In addition to scouring the help wanted ads or getting career advice on *Monster.com*, you can now network there, too. Search for people by keyword, such as radiology or Kaiser Permanente, and zip code, to find helpful contacts.

### Tribe.net

Although *Tribe.net* is known primarily as an on-line social meeting place, the site has added access to job listings to help its members with the professional side of their life. But its mission is still mainly to bring together individuals with common hobbies and interests, not career goals.

### Classmates.com

Although this site was originally designed to help high school and college chums catch up, its "Work and Careers" section provides a means of finding former classmates who now work for a particular organization. Looking for an "in" at a particular health system? You may find that a friend from grade school now works there and can give you the inside scoop. ■

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Outside, Inc., Luo used his LinkedIn contacts to make contact with a company representative, who was three degrees away—essentially, a friend of a friend of a friend. Once he received his contact information, Luo called to ask if the company would be willing to donate a keyboard to support AATP's schol-

arship program. Just two days later, the keyboard was in his hands, says Luo. Making contact through LinkedIn worked much better than cold calls, he says. "I've e-mailed lots and lots of software companies [for donations] and usually never hear back from them. This works great."

LinkedIn has also helped Luo at-

**John Luo MD has used on-line networking sites to expand membership in his professional organization and secured a donation for a scholarship recipient. He says LinkedIn is one of the first places he would turn if he should lose his job.**

tract new AATP members. He's been able to increase the organization's membership 5 to 10 percent through contacts he's made on LinkedIn.

Today, Luo says he only checks into LinkedIn about once a month, "to see what's new." However, it would be one of the first places he'd turn if he were to lose his job, he says—a testament to his confidence in the strength of his on-line contacts.

Like Luo, Leslie "Les" Chun, MD, a third year resident in internal medicine at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, uses LinkedIn sporadically. Having earned his MBA at UCLA before entering medical school, Chun's time in the business arena showed him how important networking is.

In business school, networking was a critical aspect of identifying and pursuing jobs and business opportunities. It was widely recognized that establishing relationships with others could be beneficial in both the short and long term. In medical school, however, there is a different mindset, says Chun. "I just have to work hard," is the common belief, he explains, with no emphasis on networking. For that reason, most physicians

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he knows are neither concerned nor curious about how networking can help them further their careers, which may explain why the doctors, med students, and residents haven't jumped on the on-line networking bandwagon with both feet.

### Slow adopters

Of the more than two million registered users at LinkedIn, only 555 appear to be in medical practice. At Ryze, where there are 250,000 users in 200 countries, 141 members claim "doctor" as their title. Of ZeroDegrees' 375,000-plus members, 2,445 are culled using the keyword "physician," although that doesn't necessarily mean the individual is a practicing doctor. And at Spoke, 830 physician names were generated using "physician" as the title to search for, out of 24 million total potential on-line relationships available there.

Perhaps because such sites haven't fully caught on within the medical field, Chun has found that instead of linking him with colleagues, LinkedIn has kept him in touch with people outside of medicine. "Not that many physicians have signed up," he says. And yet, according to Denise Cannova of Physicians Locum Tenens, there are 650,000 physicians in the United States who potentially could. The firm, which is headquartered in Atlanta, does locum tenens hiring as well as permanent placement.

Instead, those propagating on-line networking venues are frequently information technology professionals who are sharing information and job seeking, and sales representatives

looking to find a way to a new potential client. Doctors just aren't there yet.

There are several factors behind the dearth of on-line doctors, says Chun. One is simply that "we're slow to adopt new technologies." Another is that physicians are more apt to investigate technology in response to a specific need or request, rather than a general goal of reaching out to meet others professionally. With precious little free time, doctors are often a practical bunch.

Doctors also fear an invasion of privacy once their personal contact information is out there in cyberspace, says Luo. "We get bombarded by pharmaceutical reps, so we tend to be leery of [adding ourselves to] mailing lists. We guard our inbox carefully." In reality, says Ben Smith IV, the founder of Palo Alto, California-based Spoke Software, that fear is unfounded. Today's networking sites mimic real-world networking, where friends and colleagues serve as gatekeepers, filtering out contacts and communications that do not warrant attention, he says. On line or off, such personal gatekeepers shield their colleagues from people they don't want to hear from. Still, with limited first-hand knowledge of such networking sites, doctors are wary.

Finally, older physicians are more likely to use administrative support staff to maintain their networking databases than technological tools, Chun says. "The tide is turning, though," he says. Younger physicians coming up through the ranks have grown up with computers and are boosting usage of and familiarity

with technology.

Despite the fact that on-line networking is still catching on with physicians, recruiters are already there. A survey by the National Association of Physician Recruiters and published in a 2001 *New England Journal of Medicine* article found that search firms now rely more on the Internet and other forms of technology than anything else in identifying and recruiting doctors. In fact, the Internet was by far the most-used tool, followed by advertising and network database searches. Ninety percent of the recruiters surveyed say they rely heavily on the Internet to do their job and 97 percent say that such technology has improved their ability to recruit.

Recruiters are on line looking for candidates to fill jobs. Doctors who are on line have a significant advantage for being recruited, says Cannova, mainly because they are more easily accessible. Cannova is a Rockford, Illinois-based physician recruiter with Physicians Locum Tenens.

### Getting started

Physicians interested in checking out on-line networking opportunities will be pleased to see that the Web sites are fairly easy to use. They're also currently free. All offer a basic level of access at no charge; Ryze also offers the option of more advanced search capabilities for \$9.95 per month.

To get started, potential members set up an account at one of the sites, which involves typing in personal information such as current job title, employer or affiliation, location, and experience—typical resume details—and selecting a password. Ryze uses

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keywords to help users more easily identify—and be able to search for—others with similar interests, backgrounds, or location, for example. Participants can also typically select the level of privacy they prefer, electing to hide their profile or contact information from those they aren't connected to, or allowing anyone to get in touch. Users can also specify the types of assistance they'd like to receive from other members, such as help finding a job or hiring an employee, finding contract work, finding information about prospective employers or cities, or finding others with similar interests. At Spoke, more than 85 percent of requests made by network participants are for information, reports a *CareerJournal.com* article. At LinkedIn, more than 50 percent of the on-line connections made are hiring related.

To filter out unwanted communication, some sites, such as LinkedIn, require an introduction through another member. The upside is that contacts forwarded are generally legitimate and more likely of interest, though the downside is that simple requests can take weeks or months to make their way down the chain of contacts and back again. Perhaps to address this delay, other sites, such as ZeroDegrees, allow direct emails between participants.

Once in the system, participants are encouraged to invite their friends and colleagues to join the on-line network, thereby extending the network further. The networks are built on the premise that we are all "six degrees of separation," or six people, from anyone else in the world. The

more participants in any on-line network, the closer each participant is to everyone else. And the closer she is to someone who may be good for her career.

### Networking effectively

The best way to get started at networking on line is to complete a personal profile at one or more of the sites. Revealing more, rather than less, information about yourself up front in your profile helps improve your networking ability. Anyone who happens across your profile—perhaps because they are looking for people with your skills, or maybe they're scanning fellow University of Pennsylvania alumni—may spot something in your profile that sparks interest in on-line contact. Having a thorough profile encourages that contact. Even if you provide only the basics—your current employer or school, career history, educational background, interests, published articles, and hobbies—you significantly increase the odds of hearing from others looking for someone with your background.

Once your personal profile is complete and loaded in the system, make the most of your on-line networking opportunities by following these general guidelines:

- **When you do ask for assistance from others, be as specific as possible. Don't ask for help finding a job in Dallas, but instead ask for advice on the best way to position yourself to get the job at Medical City Hospital in Dallas. Most people want to help you, but the more narrow your request, the easier it is for them to recognize they have information, or a professional contact, that**

can help you.

- **Show that you've done some research yourself, rather than asking others to do it all for you, especially when it comes to a job search. Demonstrating that you've done some digging will earn respect and may speed your information-gathering process.**
- **Pursue and post testimonials from employers, professors, and clients. Some sites allow others to comment on your abilities, track record, or knowledge base, in your personal profile. You may find that such endorsements help push your request or resume to the top.**
- **Link your on-line networking activities with off-line events whenever possible, such as those arranged through Ryze, for instance, to improve the strength of your connections. Such cross-over can be good for your career and your social life.**
- **Be willing to help others when you see an opportunity, rather than constantly asking others to assist you. Don't expect to see instant results from your networking efforts. Depending on how active you are at networking and at building your own on-line connections, it could take weeks, months, or even years—just as in the off-line, face-to-face world—to see a direct benefit from all your efforts.**

### Looking to the future

Some physicians can see the potential of such sites to help them network, but they haven't yet reaped the rewards. Although she is in the midst of completing her residency, Tia Konzer, DO, expects on-line networking sites like ZeroDegrees to play an important role as she establishes her own practice in a few years. A psychiatry resident at Sparrow Hospital

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System at Michigan State University in East Lansing, Michigan, Konzer happened onto the ZeroDegrees site about four or five months ago and signed up to explore what it had to offer.

“I thought that you can never start too early to develop connections in your own field and elsewhere,” says Konzer, who hopes to gain both career contacts and friends on line. She believes that some of the best ways to improve business, regardless of the field, is through contacts and connections within various communities. She hopes to be able to meet people who may be able to use her services, and to identify people whose expertise she will need. Her sense is that “it can never hurt to meet new people, gain new friendships, and make connections with people in various occupational and social fields.” And Konzer expects that if she does start her own practice, it will be much easier with the help of the network she has developed.

Adrian Scott, PhD, the CEO and founder of Ryze agrees. “If you’re building your company or your career, investing in your network will pay off.” It may even earn you more money. “Every study that’s been done states that your level of networking correlates with a higher salary,” says Scott. It’s yet another reason to start networking on line. ■

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