

Happy About Online Networking

The virtual-ly
simple way to
build professional
relationships



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Liz Ryan



“Happy About® Online Networking” Book Excerpt

The virtual-ly simple way to
build professional relationships

By Liz Ryan

foreword by Tory Johnson,
Founder and CEO of Women For Hire

**Subset of the book brought
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- Getting the book and other books from Happy About

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Foreword by Tory Johnson, Founder and CEO of Women For Hire

Just as we've finally mastered the handshake, eye contact and thirty-second spiel, a whole new world of networking comes our way with a completely different set of rules. In the fast-paced frenzy of the Internet, no longer can we wing-it and expect stellar results; instead, to get what we want from online networking, we must understand the playing field and master the essential etiquette.

For starters, I need help cutting through the clutter of websites to focus on the best resources with the greatest potential of positively impacting my career. When trying to navigate the social and professional networking sites, I admit I never know quite what to post when completing online profiles. Should I be funny and irreverent to catch a reader's attention? Or is oh-so-serious both smarter and more professional when trying to convey an online persona? I'm not alone in this confusion.

Just like other busy professionals—both tech-savvy and those not as comfortable with the online landscape, I'm equally interested in knowing the rules of engagement for reaching out virtually to new contacts. These days between list-servs, online forums, and more groups than are even imaginable, I truly believe that just about anyone is accessible via

cyberspace, but how and where can I find them? And when I do, I want to be sure my method and style of communication compels them to respond.

Fortunately, online networking guru Liz Ryan is a master at telling us just what we need to know. From teaching us how to maximize a presence online to showing us how to forge meaningful cyber connections and so much more, she leads us to victory with this comprehensive, user-friendly guide. It's a must-read for anyone who's doing anything online and wants to do it even better.

1 The Truth About Online Networking

Congratulations to you—and welcome to the world of online networking! As someone who has been an online networker for a decade, I have made fast friends, cultivated terrific business contacts, and received life—and career-changing advice from the wonderful people I've met online. Online networking is neither expensive nor complicated, and it has major benefits for businesspeople who are willing to invest in relationships. This book is intended to give you the knowledge and tools you need to become an effective online networker.

I have a friend who calls the online networking world, the realm he and I both spend countless hours in, “Thunderdome.” The reference comes from the series of popular Mel Gibson films (“Mad Max” and its sequels) in which a post-apocalyptic civilization lives amidst the ruins of an earlier city. Why is the description apt? Because much of the infrastructure that makes today's online networking possible, was laid down during the go-go 1990's, the dot-com boom—that's the earlier civilization, now in ruins, that the name “Thunderdome” brings to mind.

Today, the late-90's dot-com boom is a memory, but the pipes and wires that allow us to communicate almost instantly with networking contacts around the globe, remain—the pipes and the awareness of how technology can enable our human connections. Online networking has moved past the stage of being a nifty trick, a way to impress your friends by mentioning your good pals on five continents. In our global business world, online networking is becoming a business necessity.

As with any new technology, there's a great deal of hype about online networking. Newbies enter the online networking arena expecting to find a sort of instant-connection machine inside their PC. They've heard about online dating, and think that maybe online networking works the same way: you type your specifics onto a screen, and out pops your next boss, next client, or Daddy Warbucks investor. It doesn't work quite that way.

The purpose of this book is to equip you with an understanding of online networking systems; the tools and resources you'll need to get going; and a solid knowledge of online networking etiquette (and some reminders on basic networking protocols, including amusing horror stories) to allow you to jump online and network without fear. If you're new to the online networking arena, you'll know more than many, if not most, of the online networking crowd by the time you've finished this book. If you're a veteran, you should learn a few new tricks to make the most of your online networking activities.

Before we get started with the How-Tos, there are a few online networking myths we should quickly kill off. Here are ten of my favorites:

Ten Online Networking Myths

Myth One. Online networking is the art of finding jobs, business partners, investors, or new clients online.

This is a myth for semantic reasons. You can find all of these things, and more—advice, education, and moral support, for instance—through online networking. But online networking isn't a system or process for achieving these things online, any more than offline networking is the art of finding jobs, clients, or investors offline.

Offline networking is the practice of meeting people, maintaining contact with them, and cultivating your relationships over time. Good things can and do result from those behaviors. But it would be cynical and crass to define offline networking as simply a way to get what you want through other people. And it works the same way online.

In fact, this is a central tenet of this book: online networking, just as the old-fashioned offline kind, is always about connections between and among people, rather than the outcome of those connections. If you approach networking as a means to an end (I'll get a client! I'll get a job!) you'll be losing out on the rich possibilities embedded in the experience of networking online. If you approach online networking as connecting with and supporting other people, you'll be amazed at the results you get.

Myth Two. Online networking is conducted totally in cyberspace.

The role of the Internet and “cyberspace” varies in online networking, from total (the only way you interact with some online networking contacts may be online) to partial (I met my friend Vincent online, but now we prefer to talk by phone) to very limited (you may meet someone online originally, and then have a face-to-face relationship going forward). All of these examples include online networking activities, but all of your online networking program doesn't have to happen online. Sometimes you have to get away from the computer.

Myth Three. In online networking, you can transact business without knowing Thing One about your new contact.

You can launch a Web site, sit back and collect the dollars if you're selling Lucky Bamboo plants online or collecting revenue via Google's AdSense™ program. If people come to your content site and click on your ads, or stop by your E-commerce site and buy your merchandise, you don't have to have a relationship with them. But that, of course, isn't online networking.

In the early days, there was a heady, exuberant (irrational or otherwise) feeling to online networking, like “You're online! I'm online! Let's know each other!” People tend to be a little more cautious these days. If you remember all the way back to the late 90's, then you recall that some

people would jump into a business relationship (“Sure, I’ll do some freelance writing for you,” or “No problem, I’ll design a website for you”) without a lot of preamble.

But these days, online networkers are more judicious. Online or offline, they want to know with whom they’re dealing, and that’s an absolutely appropriate way to view things. You don’t have to become fast friends to do business with people you meet online, but you have to show the same care and responsibility for the new relationship that you would if you met a person face-to-face in your own city.

(My friend Jennifer met her boyfriend online, way back in 1996 when they were college students. Back then, the Web wasn’t so crowded, and you could browse around and find a person’s homepage any day of the week. Jennifer found Brian’s homepage, and wrote to him... and the rest is history. Today, the Web is a bit more crowded. This generation’s Jennifer and Brian are more likely to find one another on MySpace™ than through Brian’s home-grown website.)

Myth Four. In online networking, it’s the number of contacts you’ve got that makes you successful.

Myth Four takes us smack into a raging controversy among online networkers, known as the QVQ (Quality versus Quantity) debate. It’s pretty simple: the QVQ debate pits the more-is-better crowd (Team Quantity) against the die-hards who argue for a smaller, more robust network (Team Quality). As you read this book, you can decide which approach is best for you. But please accept my word, even so early in our relationship, that a large number of contacts is not the road to fame and fortune (at least not by itself).

Myth Five. Online networking is free.

Online networking is cheap, but it’s not free. As you dive into the online networking mosh pit, you’ll become acutely aware of the value of your own time. When you’ve spent an hour reading two days’ worth of list-serv digests, and another half-hour updating your online contacts and corresponding with your online buddies about nothing in particular, you’ll realize that everything has a cost. It’s true that many online networking resources are free to users. That’s the good news. What’s also true is that you’ll need to budget your time, pay attention to what

works and what doesn't work for you, and remove yourself from expensive (in the sense of time-consuming/low-yield) online networking entanglements promptly. We'll look in detail at this topic later!

Myth Six. Online networking is anonymous.

Remember the old New Yorker cartoon? It showed a dog sitting at a PC, with the caption "On the Internet, no one knows you're a dog." Now, I have met and corresponded with some spectacularly doggy networkers online, and it's true that they were able to conceal their canine nature for awhile. But your true identity will come out sooner or later. With each passing day, the ways that a networker can learn the truth about you (using Google™, LinkedIn™, and a zillion other sources) grow. Ethical online networking includes honest and upfront communication about who you are (dachshund, Welsh corgi, etc.), what you want, and what you can and cannot deliver to a new contact.

Myth Seven. Online networking requires sophisticated technical skills.

We're lucky this one isn't true! If it were, I'd be sunk, and plenty of prodigious online networkers would go down with me. Most of what you need to network online, you already have: a PC or Mac with an Internet connection, an E-mail account, and decent written English skills (this is assuming that you're networking using the English language). That's plenty to get started.

Myth Eight. Online networking is cheesy.

How dare you! Online networking isn't cheesy, or at least, it doesn't need to be. The reason online networking can have a vulture-ish reputation is because of a small group of tacky, inappropriate online networkers. I shall share some stories from my dealings with that crowd in later chapters. For now, rest assured: online networking is what you make it, from the height of polite behavior to unspeakably rude and crass self-promotion. You get to choose what kind of online networker you want to be.

Myth Nine. Online networking is mostly for job-seekers.

I can understand why you would think this myth is true. The big job sites like Monster.com™, CareerBuilder.com™ and HotJobs.com™ are mega-traffic magnets. But finding a job on a big jobs site is not online networking. It's more like purchasing Beatles paraphernalia on eBay™ than it is like making a new connection online. It's a batch process, for one thing. It's a commercial transaction, for another (or the prelude to a commercial transaction, called extending and accepting a job offer). Job seekers can gain a ton of ground by moving some of their networking energy online. But online networking is a terrific tool for everyone!

Who can benefit from online networking?

- Job seekers
- Corporate people who have jobs
- Recruiters
- Consultants
- Attorneys
- Media people
- Government employees
- Not-for-profit and association people
- Academics and university staff professionals
- Students
- Stay-at-home people

Whom did I forget? Monks in religious communities can network online, and they do. Older people in assisted living communities can network

online. If you name a group of people, there is an online community for them. Anyone who has a PC and an Internet connection can network online.

NOTE: We should note something important here—this book is concerned with and intended for grown-ups. People under 18 should not be networking online, although there are safe, supervised sites developed for the purpose of helping young people cultivate pen pals and the like. As parents and community members, we are all responsible for keeping the Internet safe for children. Please teach your kids, your nephews and nieces, and other children in your sphere, that online networking is strictly an activity for adults.

Myth Ten. Online networking is the process of collecting new contacts.

This myth is related to Myth Four, the one about building up a massive list of contacts. But it's a slightly different myth. Myth Four suggested that having a zillion online connections is the name of the game in online networking, which is definitely not a given. Myth Ten proposes that all you have to do, to network online, is to grab people's virtual business cards. False! The virtual business cards an online networker ends up with (or Plaxo contacts or LinkedIn connections) are the booby prizes, if that's all that he or she collects. It's the relationships behind those pieces of paper or blocks of text that make online networking worthwhile.

Okay, we've demolished some myths. Now let's get going!

What is Online Networking?

So what is online networking? Here's my definition:

Online networking describes the set of activities associated with creating and nurturing business relationships via the Internet.

It's not very complicated. Online networking, in my view, is merely taking advantage of online tools and resources to create and further business and personal relationships.

Now, as soon as I write “business and personal relationships” we move into a marginal zone. If you want to, you might expand this definition of online networking to include all the tools, Web sites and activities associated with online dating. But to learn about those, you'll have to buy a different book. This book is concerned with business networking only. Is there an intersection between business networking and personal relationships, like friendships? Most definitely, and we'll explore that relationship in a later chapter; but we draw the line at online dating or purely socially-oriented meet-ups. In this book, we're interested in business networking, and if some friendship enters the picture, it's all good.

How To Think About Online Networking

Here's a quick analogy to help you think about your online network and online networking activities. In the real world, you have a network. If you're a serious networker, you may have a firm grasp of the size, scope and composition of your network, but most of us don't have a clue. We just know that we know some people.

In the real world, we're surrounded by people, some of whom we know well, and some of whom we barely know. We don't have to catalog those relationships or track their progress to know that we have some connections, at home, at work and in other arenas. We call on our contacts, they call on us, we help one another with various things. It's not all that complicated.

Online networking simply moves these relationships, wholly or in part, online. Online networking increases our networking “reach” through the vast expanses of cyberspace. Online networking allows us to reach out to learn about people we'd never meet in “real life.” Online networking allows us to leverage the relationships that our good friends have (simply by knowing that these relationships exist) and to keep better track of our own relationships.

Online, we have the same networking responsibilities we'd have if we met a person at a Chamber of Commerce function in our own city. We have to be polite, and we have to focus on people rather than what they can do for us. We owe our contacts some level of responsiveness when they contact us, and we owe them the favor of not hitting them up at every turn for assistance or attention. We have to treat them, in other words, as we'd like to be treated ourselves.

Key Points Discussed

Online networking is a practical, inexpensive way to develop and cultivate business relationships online. Online networks give their members powerful tools for growing their businesses, finding jobs, and collaboration, among other things. Online networking also creates responsibilities for networkers. None of the obligations that come with traditional, face-to-face networking are eliminated online.

About the Author



Liz Ryan is a former Fortune 500 executive, serial entrepreneur, and expert on the new-millennium workplace. Liz was VP of HR for U.S. Robotics throughout its period of rapid growth in the 90's, and co-founded software startup Ucentric Systems in 1999 (now a division of Motorola). Liz founded Liz Ryan Consulting in 1997 to advise large employers and startups (DDB Needham, NBCi, Looksmart, et al) on their HR and organizational strategy needs; and in 1999 she founded WorldWIT, now the world's largest online network for professional women.

Liz is the workplace columnist for Business Week online and a frequent CNN, CNBC and MSNBC columnist on the workplace, networking, and work/life topics. Liz writes on networking for the blog magazine New West (www.newwest.net) and on women and entrepreneurship for AllBusiness.com (www.allbusiness.com). She is a sought-after speaker and pundit, whom business guru Tom Peters called "a woman on a mission.....the right mission."

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