



## Even in on-line world, face-to-face networking needed

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It may be easier to "sit in your office and interact with your computer screen," as Lillian Bjorseth says, but her admonition that "Face-to-face networking will never go away" is worth noting. "The information (you see) on the computer may not be accurate," she explains. "You need to see the whites of their eyes."

That said, Bjorseth has just updated her profile on LinkedIn, the ubiquitous business networking site. "You need both facets" to be a successful networker, she explains.

Bjorseth, a respected how-to-do-it networker, is president and CEO of Duoforce Enterprises, Inc., Lisle. She's also right: Both traditional and online networking matter.

Yet LinkedIn and other online networks are popular in part because they offer relief from the need to actually make conversation with a fellow networker. The information you post in your profile becomes your "Hi, my name is -" gambit.

Assuming that your online goal is to generate additional business rather than connect with long ago high school friends, the profile is an opportunity "to turn yourself into someone others should know," says J.D. Gershbein.

For Gershbein, president of Owlsh Communications, a social media strategy company in Vernon Hills, an effective profile incorporates "the best 100 words (to) create a favorable impression and establish your brand." Done well, Gershbein says, the profile can "make you and your business come alive. A powerful LinkedIn profile can be a deal maker."

On the other hand, Gershbein adds, "A poorly written profile with typos and no photo can be a deal breaker."

"Research," answers Brian Basilico when asked about LinkedIn's value. "LinkedIn is more of a resource than a networking tool. You can research the right person at (a prospective client) you're approaching and learn some new things" that might help with a sales pitch.

Basilico, director of direction at Aurora-based B2b Interactive Marketing, notes, however, that online connections are "just part of the marketing mix. And you still need face-to-face networking."

In downtown Wheaton, Erin Jones took networking into her own hands. "The key to making it through this recession (is) to join forces with other businesses for the greater good," Jones says. "I work too hard as a business owner to be overcome by bad news everyday."

Consequently, Jones organized a networking event at her Inner Focus Pilates Studio that brought six fellow downtown merchants together to discuss ways the businesses could promote each other.

That first networking initiative has brought some new clients and uncovered possible new instructors. "My goal is to reach out to local business owners," Jones says.

Enough get it that Jones is planning a similar event next month with a like-thinking Glen Ellyn retailer.

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