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Face-toface relationships are the way to go

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Without a doubt, the meteoric rise in social networking sites is nothing less than phenomenal. The increase in the number of FaceBook members has been astronomical is just the last year. FaceBook boasts of 200 million active users, according to the press page on the tremendously popular site. Facebook and you cannot ignore the astounding rise in the number of people posting thoughts on Twitter; 340,000 to date and nearly 2000 new accounts added daily. (Put in a link to twitterfacts.blogspot.com)

LinkedIn is the de facto standard of business social networking and is the tool of choice for those looking for new customers as well as those looking for jobs.

These technological tools have greatly expanded our reach to hundreds and even thousands of others. It's incredible inexpensive, easy to use and certainly effective.

However, according to Lillian Bjorseth of Duoforce (www.duoforce.com), a popular public speaker and a communications skills coach in the greater Chicagoland area., you cannot rely solely on social networking sites to increase your visibility and raise awareness. According to Bjorseth, "My increasing requests for speaking engagements on face-to-face techniques lead me to believe people again realize the value of this form of networking to increase sales, find a job and build solid relationships that last. It is the safest, most effective and preferred way to begin accumulating the kind of wealth you need throughout your life: social capital, i.e., a large network of knob turners to open doors to whatever you are seeking. I'm going to ballyhoo face-to-face as the preferred initial contact. It deserves equal time!

"About 90 percent of in-person communication is conveyed through nonverbal actions. Your walk, posture, handshake, eye contact, facial expressions and appearance as well as your tone, rate, pitch, speed and inflection share volumes with those who are astute people readers. This form of communication is missing online. The words account for about 10 percent. If someone you want to meet is geographically inaccessible, the second best thing is to spend time with her/him on the telephone because you can engage the person in an interactive conversation to hear voice modularity and get a quick feel for her/his communication style and business savvy."

Bjorseth states that it's difficult to engender trust just by having a presence on LinkedIn. While having an online photo or video is helpful, it's not the same as shaking one's hand and looking them directly in eye. She aims to strike a balance between in-person meetings and a web presence.

"Increased personal contacts will also help you increase your online contacts on sites like LinkedIn since most of you link only with people you know. You become more valuable as the

size and quality of your network grows.” states Bjorseth. Since you usually only want to work with people you know and trust, there’s no substitute for face time.

Recently, someone in a LinkedIn group that I belong to (a suburban Chicago consultants group) suggested an after-hours dinner meeting at a restaurant in Geneva, IL. Nearly 40 people attended. I made a number of valuable contacts, one of whom started a Meetup.com group for computer professionals. I attended that group’s meeting and bumped into several people I already knew, but most importantly, met a number of new people.

So, it’s not an “either/or” situation. Use whatever technology available to gain visibility, but use face-to-face meetings to really get to know a person to find out what they’re all about.