

5 VIRTUAL NETWORKING MISTAKES TO AVOID



Introduction

In our modern world, networking is different than ever before. Many people are working from home or remote locations because it is less expensive and more convenient for the type of work that they need to get done. This is also a big way for companies to entice the right people to work with them.

Because so many people are not coming to the office all the time, the way that we network is changing too. You need to find new and exciting ways to network and meet with other people, and doing it in a virtual manner is an effective way to make this work.

There are countless ways that you can meet with others virtually. And when it is done well, it can be even more effective than meeting others in-person like in the past. However, you need to do it in the right way. Avoiding some of the common virtual networking mistakes is one of the best ways to be as effective and fruitful when it comes to some of the people you can meet while expanding your network from anywhere. Some of the top virtual networking mistakes that you need to avoid include:

Being Unprofessional Because You are At Home

Since you work at home all day, it is easy to get a little lack about your appearance and how you portray yourself. You may sit behind a computer and have no one see you all day long so you will be comfortable and not look at professional. This has to change if you are doing an interview or another type of meet and greet where others can see you.

Don't let the unprofessionalism take over when you do Skype or Zoom. Pretend that you are in the office. Check that the volume and the lighting look good before you even try to begin and be aware of some of the background that is behind you. Clean up the area around you, or the whole office preferably, to ensure that no one is going to see a big mess when they look at the screen.

The outfit that you wear is going to be important too. You need to take off the sweatpants and bad shirts that you are wearing and put on something professional. It is fine if you dress down to do your work most of the time since no one is going to see you. But with a networking event, others will see you, and you need to make sure they are impressed. In networking, first impressions are going to be a big deal so make sure you dress up like you are showing up to the office for those video calls.

Before any meeting, take the time to look around the room. Notice if there is any mess behind you that you need to worry about. It is best to clean up the whole room if possible just in case you need to move the computer screen around at all. Look for anything that is embarrassing, unprofessional, or just a big mess. If you are short on time, then you can consider just cleaning up the area that is immediately around you and then be careful not to move around a lot while you are talking to some of your contacts.

Then it is time to move on to some of the clothes that you wear. It may be acceptable to show up in your pajamas when you work remotely, but this is not going to look good for some of your contacts when networking. Bring out a nice shirt and pants and look like you are going to an interview along the way. This gives off a better impression and makes it look like you are more of a professional while you network.

Networking is Not Just About You

The next mistake that people will make with all sorts of networking, whether they are doing it in-person or virtually, is that they forget that it is not just about them. Networking is something that needs to prove beneficial to both parties and not just to you. The second that it becomes all about you is the second that contact is going to lose interest and will decide not to work with you on it at all.

This is a new relationship that needs to be beneficial to both parties. It is easy to get caught up a bit in the self-promotion, which makes it easy to forget all about the true meaning of networking. In networking, you want to focus on helping one another out. But it is easy to forget this, which makes it harder to form some of the long lasting connections that you want along the way.

Forgetting Your Existing Contacts

It is exciting when it comes to networking to see how many people you can gather up into the network that you want to form. You want to meet new people, make some new connections, and see how all of this can go. And that is an admirable trait to have. But you need to remember some of your current contacts as well, or you may find that your list gets smaller and smaller all the time.

Networking isn't just about you seeing how many new connections you can get. It is also not just about contacting others when you need something. If this is the way that you treat your network, you will soon find that you do not have much of a network. There is so much more that comes with networking than that. So, do not just focus on the new connections and do not fall into the habit of reaching out to someone only when you need something from them.

You need to maintain some contacts the whole time. Think about when you can reach out to your current contacts and even set some reminders to help you remember when to talk to an existing contact again. It is perfectly fine to start a conversation just to catch up. Ask how they are doing, what is new, and what you can do to help them. You may have no reason to contact them at the time, but it will make that contact feel good. Nobody wants to be contacted just to hear a sales pitch. If you have meaningful conversations with that person, you will find that when you do want something, they are more willing and open to help you.

Send the Message

Too many times someone will send a connect request on LinkedIn or another site in the hopes of increasing some of the reach that they have online. But this is not going to work and often looks like spam. Think back to how many times this has happened to you in the past. Did you actually respond to the request? If you did not know who the person well, you probably ignored it and that is what others are going to do to you in this same situation.

If you are sending out a connection request to someone else, then you need to make sure to send along a message as well. And do not use a canned message that sounds like spam. Make this a personalized message that is going to get you noticed. This needs to happen with each and every connection request that you have. And the less that you know the person, the more time and thought you will need to put into the message that you would like to send to them.

This may not be as necessary if you plan to send out a connection to someone you already know, especially if you work with them or know them really well. But it doesn't hurt to send a little one to catch up or remind them how you both know one another just in case. It is a personal touch that is going to make all of the difference when you want to grow your own network.

Most professionals are not going to mind getting a connection request, even from someone they do not know. This is how the LinkedIn profile works and they may see it as a way to provide them with a larger network as well. But they still would like to know a little bit about you as well. They want to know something about why you are so interested in being one of their connections and why they can benefit from working with you on this social media site. A quick message stating the reasons that you want to connect is always a good idea. Just a small message is usually fine.

Remember the Time Zones

The final trick that we need to remember here is the different time zones. At first, you may just find people who are in the same time zone as you, so this is not as big of a problem as before. However, as you grow out those connections and try to reach other people, you may find that some of the professionals you connect with are found all over the world.

The more locations where you find some of the professionals you want to connect with, the more time zones you need to worry about. This means that some of your connections may not be available during the day when you usually are active. Some may need you to make special accommodations so that they can come along and hear your message.

Try to make your webinars and meetings as accessible as possible for everyone. If it is just a few professionals on the other side of the world, you may need to be up in the middle of the night to get it done. If you have a larger group of contacts to consider, then you may need to find a time that works the best for the majority of the people you want to reach.

Your goal is to pick a time that works well for your global team and then check in with them ahead of time. This makes it easier to plan around the schedule for everyone else. If there are just too many time zones to work with, then you may have to do one live event at a time that works for most people and then leave up the taped recording so everyone else is able to get to it. Or you can choose to do it at a few different times so that as many people as possible can see the information.

Taking Care of Your Virtual Network

Virtual networking is the way of the future. Many people are working from home or other remote locations, making it harder to get to the networking they need in the office. Even those who are in the office may find that traditional ways of networking are not as easy to work with compared to some of the ways that you can utilize with virtual networking. And there are so many unique ways that you can utilize virtual networking in order to get results and meet new people.

As you decide to navigate some of your work to virtual networking, you may be surprised by how much you are able to get done along the way. However, you need to make sure that you follow the right protocols along the way to make it successful. By following some of the tips above, you will be able to have success at virtual networking for all your needs