5 Easy Ways to Boost Your Online Network

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Although a growing number of legal professionals prefer to cultivate business relationships online, many people remain overwhelmed by virtual networking. They’re either not sure how to use it effectively or consider it just another thing they “should” do.

But it doesn’t have to be a puzzle or a burden. You can develop your online professional reputation and help others in the process with some simple practices. Consider these suggestions for making the most of your efforts without consuming too much of your time:

1. **Speak up.**

It’s of little value to have an online presence if you never seem to be “present.” Don’t be hesitant to share your knowledge or point of view, especially if you’re well versed on a particular topic or legal area. For instance, you might post a relevant news article or comment on a legal matter in the news. Try to add value by offering an observation that may not be so obvious to others.

2. **Acknowledge others.**

Pay attention to what people are saying or working on. You can offer helpful suggestions, send articles of interest or just leave a comment to let members of your network know they’re being heard. This may take you only 45 seconds of effort but could have a big impact on the people you want to develop closer professional relationships with.

3. **Grow your circle.**

Try to add at least one new person to your network a week. Expanding networks are far more effective than stagnant ones. But don’t get hung up on the numbers. There are many ways to get more “followers,” but those large follower or friend numbers don’t necessarily mean you’re getting more from your network. Instead, focus on the quality and relevance of the new relationships you’re developing.

4. **Raise your profile.**
Especially if you're trying to establish your expertise in a particular area, consider connecting LinkedIn and Twitter accounts to establish more visibility. Tweet your professional ideas and links into your profile using the hash tag #in.

5. **Tend your network.**

Dedicate a certain amount of time a week to tending your network. You may want to set goals, such as to join five new LinkedIn groups, follow 10 new people on Twitter each month, or network on Facebook for a set amount of time each day. Investing just a few minutes a day can pay significant returns.

Finally, remember that although online networking can be highly effective in reaching a large number of contacts and boosting your profile, don't allow it to completely replace more traditional approaches. In-person interactions remain essential for developing a personal rapport with others, building trust and ultimately benefiting from the power of networking.

For more pointers on virtual networking and business etiquette, see this Robert Half Legal publication, *Business Etiquette: The New Rules in a Digital Age.*