



## Networking and Professional Relationship Articles

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He is the director of *Two Degrees Group*, which provides a range of consulting services including tailored on-demand professional development workshops, discrete professional intermediary services and the design, and the development and management of professional networks for organisations.

He is often invited to deliver workshops on a range professional communication topic and strategies, as well as a being a guest speaker for a range of organisations on professional networking.

Phillip is also the founder of Canberra's most innovative professional and social networking community, *Schmooze* which he founded in 2003. Schmooze offers a comprehensive range of events and business opportunities for its members and guests each month and online including workshops, special interest groups and networking functions.

You can also visit his personal website here at [www.phillipajones.com](http://www.phillipajones.com) and the Schmooze website: [www.schmooze.net.au](http://www.schmooze.net.au)



## Online Networking: An Effective Tool?

With the current craze for online social networking the question has to be asked, how effective are these tools for networking?

At face value they seem very effective-there are millions of users globally. But numbers of users are not a true indication of usefulness for professionals in generating contacts, sourcing work or promoting your expertise.

For instance, the difficulties that Facebook has had in trying to commercialise its website and introduce targeted advertising, and the resulting 'push-back' and drop-off of members is a case in point. Since the premise of that site was social networking, to introduce a commercial aspect or professional element into goes against its premise and why people use it.

The emerging rule seems to be that you don't mix your work life with Facebook et alia- as the image most people represent there (their personal brand) is often at odds with their professional persona- especially the photos!

Certainly, thought has to go into how you represent yourself online, the same way a corporate website has to be up to speed and effective in presenting the brand and expertise of the organisation. So often you see regular online networkers with two 'online brand identities: social and professional!

Another site, LinkedIn, is intended as purely for professional networks and allows users to put a work profile and create links to other colleagues/contacts. Its effectiveness depends on how up to date the profiles are (I've found many of them to be out of date as opposed to Facebooks 'what I did in the last 10 minutes' approach)- but it can be useful to see who knows who and what circles they mix in- basically where they sit in the food chain. But I've never known anyone get work out of it however, at least not directly.

But here's the rub, for the most part you only get to be 'friends' or 'linked' to your online contacts by knowing the people personally and through face to face contact!

So in short, you still have to get in the same room with these people and then create an electronic relationship and use those tools to stay in touch. They can be very useful to stay up to speed on such things as contacts change of work or moving interstate, or do research and backgrounding on someone you want to cultivate, but will they get you over the line for a deal- I think not.

Another example is the Schmooze member data base on this website which is intended to facilitate member's networking; providing both some basic information about a contact that can be used to set up a meeting or find out more about someone a member met at an event. But again, it's a support tool, it can't replace face to face contact, it merely facilitates it.

Online networking is certainly part of an effective networking toolkit, but its only a part of the mix. At the end of the day you can't beat being in the right room with the right people to cultivate a relationship.