

The Top Twelve Business Etiquette Tips for Social Media

by Lydia Ramsey

There is no doubt about it-social networking, or social media if you prefer, is all the buzz. A report just out by Forrester's Research indicates that 51% of online Americans have joined a social network.

Another 73% are consuming some form of social content on a regular basis. People are connecting with, listening to, following and collaborating with each other online at an amazing rate.

Some people are using it for personal reasons. They are sharing their recipes, their photos and their ideas to stay up to date with their friends and family. Business people are using social networking sites to build their careers, promote their business and grow their reputations.

The most popular social networking sites are Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn and Twitter. Each one of those sites is uniquely positioned and serves a particular population or purpose. There are other online networking sites, numbering in the thousands, so at this point, they shall remain nameless.

The purpose of this article is not to provide information on which networking sites you should choose and why, but to provide you with tips on the etiquette of social networking. Once again, as with e-mail, cell phones, Blackberries and other technological devices or technologically driven communication, we got the technology up front and we have backed into the rules for using it with courtesy and consideration.

I am starting with a list of twelve tips on the etiquette of social networking for the polished professional. The list will, no doubt, grow with time.

#1. Fill out your online profiles completely with information about you and your business. Use your real name and your own photo. Your cat may be adorable, but unless you are a veterinarian specializing in the care and treatment of felines, don't get cute.

#2. Use a different profile or account for your personal connections. Business and pleasure do not mix in this medium.

#3. Create a section on your main profile detailing who you are seeking to befriend and ask that visitors abide by that information. Everyone need not apply.

#4. Offer information of value. Don't talk just about yourself and your company.

#5. Don't approach strangers and ask them to be friends with you just so you can then try to sell them on your products or services. You will quickly lose credibility and your so-called 'friends.'

#6. Pick a screen name that represents you and your company well. Don't call yourself 'Loser1' unless you want to be known by that name.

#7. Don't send out requests for birthdays, invitations to play games or other timewasters for those using the site.

#8. Don't put anything on the Internet that you don't want your future boss, current client or potential clients to read.

#9. Check out the people who want to follow you or be your friend. Your mother was right when she said that people will judge you by the company you keep.

#10. If someone does not want to be your friend, accept their decision gracefully. They have the right to make that choice and you have to accept it.

#11. Never post when you're overly-tired, jet lagged, intoxicated, angry or upset.

#12. Compose your posts, updates or tweets in a word processing document so you can check grammar and spelling before you send them.

The world of online networking is new to most of us, but there is little difference in connecting with people online and offline. The same basic tenets hold true. Trust and authenticity remain high on the list.

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