

Networking on Social Media

If the number of recent follows we've been getting from brand new accounts is any indication, a good number of you are shifting from in person check-ins and touch-bases to a more digital experience.

At this point, saying we live in a world made small by digital communication is like saying the world is round, water is wet and the sky is blue (unless you live in the Pacific Northwest, where everyone knows the sky is gray and full of rain clouds). It's just a given that at any point in our day, we can tap an app and immediately connect with anyone, anywhere in the world.

There's a difference, though, between connecting and making connections.

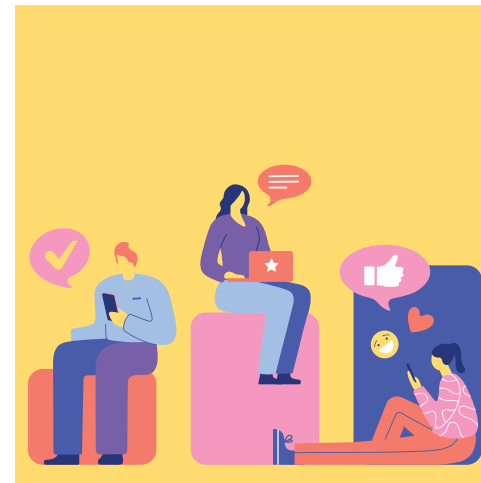
Our industry was built on a foundation of strong relationships. Over the years, the ways we build those relationships have evolved, and when done correctly, social media can become an always-on networking opportunity.

(Here's a secret—even if our tools have evolved, they're still based on those same relationship-building skills that helped make the apparel and promotional product industries what they are. Those are skills you've already mastered. It's just time to change the medium.)

Three ways you can hone your online networking skills:

1) Find Your People

Cultivate your follow lists and fill your news feed with the big-name influencers in your field. Pay particular attention to the hashtags they use in their posts. These are the keys to finding the digital cornerstones of the social media landscape. You may even discover regularly scheduled chats like #PromoChat on Twitter (every Wednesday at 3 PM ET, Noon PT) where industry professionals ask and answer topical questions for 30 minutes to an hour.



2) Connect With Professional Organizations

Seek out your professional organizations and follow them on social media. Join industry-only Facebook groups. Not only will you stay up to date on the latest news, but these accounts are professional resources filled with all sorts of valuable information.

3) Join the Conversation

The key to making meaningful connections on social media is to jump in and join the conversation. Be open and honest and speak in your authentic voice. Social media offers us the chance to develop deeper connections with our customers by giving us a venue through which we can freely communicate with each other.

A FEW WORDS OF CAUTION:

Social media is a lot more like in-person networking than you might think. When you first start joining online communities, you might be tempted to go in with a hard sell, talking about your products and your services.

Resist that urge.

Don't try to sell on social media. Talk, teach and tell stories. The minute the sales pitch comes out is the moment people stop listening.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

[The Rules of Networking on Social Media](#): An entertaining list of dos and do nots.

[How to Use Social Media in Your Career](#): A good primer on where to start and some specific for each of the major networks.

[#SproutChat Recap: Networking on Social](#): An excellent example of how people can network and collaborate in a Twitter chat.