



Networking Guide

Introduction

It is said that only around 40% of jobs are actually formally advertised! Even if this stat is a bit mis-leading in that it includes internal promotions, there is still evidence to suggest that a high volume of vacancies are filled without advertising and therefore by word of mouth or networking.

Therefore the role of networking can be an important part of the job seeking process and enable applicants to tap into what has been known as the 'hidden jobs market'.

Networking – What Is It?

Networking is something we do every day without realising it. We do it whenever we talk to someone whether we know them or not. For example, talking to someone at the bus stop. You start off talking about general matters (e.g. the weather) and if you find a common interest you might go into more detail. Networking is simply therefore the passing on of information. This is something we all do quite easily without thinking. However, label it 'networking' and suddenly it becomes hard to do or something many of us have an in-built barrier towards.

Why network?

It is important to recognise that networking is not always about the ultimate goal of finding a job. Networking is actually a useful way of learning more about a particular role or organisation and whether it might be suited to you.

How do I start networking?

Many people naturally feel quite anxious about networking especially if this isn't something you have done before. One way to get over this is to take a structured approach and the following steps have been compiled to help you through this:

1. *Identify contacts & networks* – this can start with a list of everyone you know covering what they do and also who they might know. Then expand into industry conferences, networking forums, and relevant groups on social networking.
2. *Plan your approach* – before you speak to anyone identify what you want to achieve (e.g. a lead into an organisation). Then start by mapping out who you want to talk to, why you are interested in the organisation/group and why you're approaching them.

3. *Be informed* – when approaching an organisation/group make sure you research what they do, any key current issues and importantly what your contact's role is. For example, look up people who work there on LinkedIn and search for references to the organisation on the internet.
4. *Keep it specific* – just as you would always tailor your CV before sending it to an organisation, make sure you do the same with any networking contacts.
5. *Keep organised* – given the breadth of your potential contacts and the danger of getting people confused, make sure you try to keep a record of everyone you've spoken to and what you discussed.

Barriers to networking

The reality is that some people may still feel a little uncomfortable with the concept of speaking to contacts where there could be the perception that you are trying to 'get' something from them.

The best advice is to look at networking as a 'two-way process'. Don't forget you are providing contacts or offering your skills in return for support and information.

Many people also assume that you have to be 'extroverted' in order to be good at networking. The key is actually to just 'be yourself' whilst networking as you will come across as far more natural and share your interest in the organisation/sector.

Review of key points

- **Take a structured approach to make it seem less daunting.**
- **Invest time beforehand to make sure you create a favourable impression.**
- **Be yourself and find out it isn't as hard as you feared!**

Next Steps

Professional social networking sites such as 'LinkedIn' can provide a safe and accessible way to start building a professional network and more information on using LinkedIn can be found in our guide.