

The

BNI®

Handy Guide to Networking



How Networking can help you win more business,
get the right staff, get the right job,
find the right business partner,
get the best suppliers & much more

Co-authored by

Niiraj R. Shah, BNI National Director, BNI India

Dr. Ivan Misner, PhD, Founder and Chairman, BNI



Authors



Niiraj R. Shah, BNI National Director, [BNI India](#)

Niiraj Shah is a professional networking coach, international speaker and a contributing author to the #1 Wall Street Journal best seller - "[Masters of Success](#)".

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Dr Ivan Misner, PhD, Founder and Chairman, [BNI](#)

Called the father of modern networking, Dr. Ivan Misner is the Founder of [BNI](#) and the senior partner for the [Referral Institute](#). He has written nine books, including #1 New York Times best seller [Truth or Delusion? Busting Networking's Biggest Myths](#).

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Handy Guide to Networking

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Why Network?

Why are some people more successful in life and in business? Why do they seem to get better deals, more sales, better promotions, or just live a better life? This can be particularly frustrating if you believe that you are better qualified or have a better product. Some may just dismiss this success and explain it as luck or result of being in the right place at the right time.

If we were to delve into these things a little deeper we would discover that most of these highly successful people are just ordinary people just like you and me – who happen to possess highly refined networking skills. These ordinary people achieve brilliant results as they team up with other ordinary people to achieve more than they could by themselves.

Successful people surround themselves with a well developed, sophisticated support network that they use to get everything from relevant information, to the right supplier, getting the right employee, to being referred to the right clients. Networking is essential for success in every area of your life.

The BNI handy guide to networking will share with you key insights that will help you become a more accomplished networker and ultimately become more successful! All the tips are practical, relevant and easy to apply!

Happy Networking!



Remember that
it's not called
"net-sit"
or "net-eat,"
it's called
"net-work,"

6 Types of Networks that every Networker must know about

With six types to choose from, narrowing the field will help you find the groups that are best for your business.

By Dr. Ivan Misner & Niiraj R Shah

Q: There are many types of networking groups out there. How do I know which ones to join?

A: There are at least six types of business organizations to consider joining in order to develop your business through networking. Depending on your time constraints, select at least two or three groups for participation. However--and this is critical, no matter what groups you end up participating in--remember that it's not called "net-sit" or "net-eat," it's called "net-work," and if you want to build your business through word-of-mouth, you must "work" the networking groups you belong to.

1 Casual Contact Networks

The first of the six types of networking groups are casual contact networks. These are business groups that allow many people from various overlapping professions. There are no restrictions on the number of people represented in any profession. These groups usually meet monthly and often hold mixers where everyone mingles informally. Casual contact networks may hold other meetings where there are presentations by guest speakers on important business topics or discussions on issues concerning legislation, community affairs or local business programs.

The best examples of these groups are the thousands of Chambers of Commerce and similar groups active worldwide. Examples in India include the Indian Merchants Chamber (IMC) and TIE. If you want to develop a word-of-mouth-based business, these networks can connect you with hundreds of other business people.





Strong contact networks are groups that meet weekly for the primary purpose of exchanging referrals

Many of the online business and social networking sites would also qualify in this category such as LinkedIn, Ecademy, Ryze and Facebook, some of which may also hold monthly mixers. Online networks also allow you a global reach at the click of a button.

2 Strong Contact Networks

Strong contact networks are groups that meet weekly for the primary purpose of exchanging referrals. They often restrict membership to only one person per profession or specialty and tend to be more structured in their meeting formats than casual contact networks. Their meetings include open networking; short presentations by everyone; a longer, more detailed presentation by one or two members; and time devoted solely to passing business referrals.

Such organizations require a far greater commitment from their membership. Founded in 1985, BNI is a good example of this type of organization and is the largest and most successful of its kind. (www.bni.com)

3 Community Service Clubs

Community service clubs give you an opportunity to put something back into the community where you do business while making valuable contacts and receiving good PR to boot. Community service clubs can be fairly good sources of word-of-mouth business. Such groups exist primarily to serve the community; however, they can also provide an excellent opportunity for businesspeople to meet regularly and develop relationships.

Although there is almost no overt networking, long-term friendships, which are critical to the success of a solid word-of-mouth-based business, are established. Good examples of these groups in India include Rotary, Lions and Roundtable Clubs. In many ways, community service clubs were the original networks. The oldest, Rotary, was established in 1905 by Chicago lawyer Paul Harris with the idea that one person from each profession would belong and members would, among other things, help each other in business.



If you're serious about developing word-of mouth business, there is no quick fix; you must meet people in a planned & structured way

4 Professional Associations

Professional associations, or what futurist and author John Naisbitt calls "Knowledge Networks," have existed for many years. Association members tend to be from one specific type of industry, such as banking, architecture, personnel, accounting or health. The primary purpose of a professional association is to exchange information and ideas.

Your goal in tapping into such networks is to join groups that contain your potential clients or target markets. A simple procedure for targeting key groups is to ask your best clients or customers which groups they belong to. This will give you an immediate list of at least three, and probably as many as 10 to 12, groups from which to choose.

Your best customers retain membership in the associations that offer the greatest value or for which there is some key strategic or competitive advantage. Similarly, the prospects you wish to target may, in many ways, operate like your best customers and have many of the same needs.

Here are some examples of professional associations:

- NASSCOM • TIE
- Indian Medical Association • Bombay Management Association
- Trade Association for Information Technology

5 Social/Business Organizations

Each year, more groups spring up that serve as both business and social organizations. Groups such as the Jaycees and various singles/business clubs openly combine social activities with business or networking, giving you an opportunity to combine work with a little pleasure. If you're interested in combining work with social activities, We recommend the Jaycees. They tend to be very focused and professional.



Women will be instrumental in shaping the nature of contemporary networking organizations

6 Women's Business Organizations

We believe that the next trend here in India will be Women's business organizations and they will be instrumental in shaping the nature of contemporary networking organizations. The Indian Merchant's Chamber has a very active women's wing. As more women become entrepreneurs in the next couple of decades we will see a proliferation of these groups. On the social front women's organisations such as Maila Mandal have already been very active and successful in the India. We believe the next generation of women's business organizations will have one thing in common is that they will tend to be concerned with education and professional development as well as networking. Some will be casual contact networks; some will be strong contact networks. Others will be industry-specific professional associations,

For many women, such groups will be an excellent and nonthreatening way to increase their business. Surprisingly, many women's organizations allow men in their membership. Assuming the man conducts himself professionally, he can truly benefit from membership and participation because he'll be more widely recognized within.

Times to Network?

Despite all that we've covered thus far, some people tell me they simply don't have time to go to business meetings regularly. We understand that objection well. If you feel this way, let me suggest that you stop reading this article, pick up your telephone and start making cold calls instead. Or, if you prefer, open your cheque book and start writing cheques for more advertising. If you're serious about developing word-of-mouth business, there is no quick fix; you must meet people in a planned and structured way.

Where to Network?

Which groups should you join? Don't let chance decide where you're going to spend your time and effort. Remember, the key is to diversify your activities. Don't put all your eggs in one basket; one type of business organization won't serve all your needs. Consciously select a well-rounded mix of organizations, with no two of the same type. If you have associates, partners or employees, consider their participation when deciding which groups each of you will target.





Networking is more than just shaking hands and passing out business cards, it's about building your "social capital"

How to become a Master Networker

Adopt these 10 traits, and people will be knocking down your door trying to do business with you.

Co-Authored by Dr Ivan Misner & Niiraj R Shah

Networking these days is crucial for getting everything from new clients, new employees, jobs, keeping abreast of industry trends, to getting the right information. Unfortunately we're not taught how to network at college, so I thought we'd cover some of the key traits of a master networker.

Networking is more than just shaking hands and passing out business cards. Based on a survey by networking guru, Dr. Misner conducted of more than 2,000 people throughout the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia, it's about building your "social capital." The highest-rated traits in the survey were the ones related to developing and maintaining good relationships.

The following traits were ranked in order of their perceived importance to networking. They're the traits that will make you a "master networker."

1. **Follows up on referrals** - the No. 1 trait of successful networkers. If you present an opportunity, whether it's a simple piece of information, a special contact or a qualified business referral, to someone who consistently fails to follow up successfully, it's no secret that you'll eventually stop wasting your time with this person.
2. **Positive attitude.** A consistently negative attitude makes people dislike being around you and drives away referrals. Positive business professionals are like magnets. Others want to be around them and will send their friends, family and associates to them.





Communicate
well, and
listen well
to establish
a valuable
relationship

3. **Enthusiastic:** It's been said that the best sales characteristic is enthusiasm. To be respected within our networks, we at least need to sell ourselves with enthusiasm. Once we've done an effective job of selling ourselves, we'll be able to reap the reward of seeing our contacts sell us to others!
4. **Trustworthy:** When you refer one person to another, you're putting your reputation on the line. You have to be able to trust your referral partner and be trusted in return. Neither you nor anyone else will refer a contact or valuable information to someone who can't be trusted to handle it well.
5. **Good listening skills:** Our success as networkers depends on how well we can listen and learn. The faster you and your networking partner learn what you need to know about each other, the faster you'll establish a valuable relationship. Communicate well, and listen well.
6. **Network always:** Master networkers are never off duty. Networking is so natural to them that they can be found networking in the grocery store line, at the doctor's office, at a party, as well as at the chamber mixers and networking meetings.
7. **Thank people:** Expressing gratitude to business associates and clients is just another building block in the cultivation of relationships that will lead to increased referrals. People like to refer others to business professionals that go above and beyond. Thanking others at every opportunity will help you stand out from the crowd.
8. **Enjoy helping:** Helping others can be done in a variety of ways, from literally showing up to help with an office move to clipping a helpful and interesting article and mailing it to an associate or client. Master networkers keep their eyes and ears open for opportunities to advance other people's interests whenever they can.





The key is
to build
mutually
beneficial business
relationships,
only then will you
succeed as a
master networker

- ←-----→
9. **Sincere:** Insincerity is like a cake without icing! You can offer the help, the thanks, the listening ear, but if you aren't sincerely interested in the other person, they'll know it! Those who have developed successful networking skills convey their sincerity at every turn. One of the best ways to develop this trait is to give the individual with whom you're developing a referral relationship your undivided attention.
 10. **Works their network:** It's not net-sit or net-eat, it's net-work, and master networkers don't let any opportunity to work their networks pass them by. They manage their contacts with PDA's, phones, organize their e-mail address files and carry their referral partners' business cards as well as their own. They set up appointments to get better acquainted with new contacts so that they can learn as much about them as possible so that they can truly become part of each other's networks.

Do you see the trend with these ten points? They all tie in to long-term relationship building, not to stalking the prey for the big kill. The key is to build mutually beneficial business relationships. Only then will you succeed as a master networker.



One networking style called as "scorched earth networking" results in the ground smoking wherever these networkers tread. **AVOID IT!**

5 Networking Mistakes to Avoid

In our many years of developing business networks and coaching networkers, we've noticed some very different styles of networking. One of these styles, which results in the ground smoking wherever these networkers tread, we call "scorched earth networking." Let's talk a little about this style, so you understand how important it is to **avoid** this type of networking in cultivating a successful business networking model.

Just what are the hallmarks of a scorched-earth networker? Experience has shown us that this type of networker...

1. Moves from networking group to networking group, constantly dissatisfied with the quality and quantity of referrals they get from each. The scorched-earth networker doesn't stay in one place long enough to build the type of relationships it takes to really capitalize on networking. It's like planting an apple tree in one spot, not being satisfied with the tree's growth after a matter of days, uprooting it and expecting it to grow faster in another spot. When the growth isn't happening fast enough in the new spot, the tree is uprooted yet again and replanted. Every time that tree is uprooted, it takes longer to build itself back up to even where it was before it was moved. A serious networker understands that in order for that tree to grow a bumper crop of apples, it needs to be cared for right where it is.
2. Talks more than listens. If you meet someone who talks on and on about their services, what they can provide for you, how they can help you increase your bottom line and so on--and doesn't seem genuinely interested in your business, what you do and what you need--chances are you've just met a scorched-earth networker! A serious networker will want to learn all about you, what your professional goals are, and how they can play a part in helping you accomplish those goals.





The VCP Process[®]: visibility, credibility and profitability.

3. Doesn't "honour the event," or networks at inappropriate opportunities. There's something to be said about constantly looking for an opportunity to develop a business relationship, but a serious networker is always aware of how that networking comes across. You've seen the scorched-earth networker, for instance, wanting to do business and passing out business cards at a church function, funeral or other inappropriate event. The key to networking at all times is to do it in a way that's appropriate. While it can be entirely appropriate to begin a relationship at such an event as a wedding or a funeral, going around looking for an opportunity to pass out your business cards isn't the right way to do that!
4. Thinks that being "highly visible" is enough to make business flow his way. In his book, "Business by referral", Dr. Misner talks about the VCP Process[®]: visibility, credibility and profitability. The more you're seen in the business community (visibility), the more you become known and trusted (credible). The problem with the scorched-earth networker is that they seem to think that anything they do that makes them visible is beneficial. But that's just not so. As people begin to trust you, seeing that you're dependable, honest and outwardly motivated as opposed to selfish and demanding, they then begin to refer you to others. This is when you'll see more business referrals coming in (profitability).
5. Expects others to be consistently referring them. When they're considering developing their social capital, the scorched-earth networker expects that this means finding a source of referrals that's dependable and constant. This is a "get" mentality. Scorched-earth networkers view networking as a transaction, not a relationship. Wayne Baker calls this negative type of networking "coin operated networking"--you put something in and get something back right away. Serious networkers understand that developing strong social capital means that your focus is on what you can give to your inner circle. There's a law of reciprocity and synergy that can't be denied when you focus on giving referrals to those around you. Think about how you feel when someone refers you to another person. You feel driven to repay the favour likewise.



It's not
what you know,
or
who you know
– it's how well
you know them
that counts

Scorched-earth networking doesn't work, because building your business through word-of-mouth is about cultivating relationships with people who get to know you and trust you. People do business with people they have confidence in. One of the most important things I've learned in the past two decades is this: It's not what you know, or who you know--it's how well you know them that counts. If you go into this process understanding this one key point, you'll have a better opportunity to build your business through word-of-mouth.

As you network, look around at what you leave behind. Are you creating relationships by building your social capital (farming, as opposed to hunting), or are you leaving a scorched earth and many bodies in your wake?



No matter which community you choose, however, after joining, you need to participate in whatever way you can to best grow your presence at the site

The Layman's Guide to Online Networking

When it comes to online networking, there are several ways to develop your word-of-mouth marketing, but it's important to understand that the foundation of making online networking work for you is the same as with any kind of networking--you've got to develop relationships with trusted business associates.

How, then, do you go about developing networking skills, relationships and trust in an online environment? Here are five ways to do it:

1. **Join one or more online networking communities.** In India a number of online networks have gained popularity: [LinkedIn](#), [Ecademy](#), [Ryze](#), [Xing](#) & [Facebook](#). No matter which community you choose, however, after joining, you need to participate in whatever way you can to best grow your presence at the site.

Keep in mind that it's not enough to just join and have your name on the membership list. You have to focus on building relationships with the other members of the community. This is a new concept to some; others of you will realize quickly that you can develop real relationships with people you're meeting in cyber space.

So be active in the community. Post topics on threads that deal with your area of expertise. Respond to others' postings on other threads if the subject is at all relevant to your area of expertise. Posting on relevant bulletin boards is a great way to gain visibility, which can lead to credibility and eventually new business. And the more you're seen, interacted with and talked about, the more visibility you'll gain on the site. One note of caution: Don't join too many online networking communities, or you won't be able to be involved effectively enough to build relationships.

Here's another idea: If you're already in a live networking group and then join an online



Online
networking
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"hits"

networking group, consider creating a regional or national club or a sub-community for the members of your offline group. This will just expand the amount of networking you can do within your own organization!

- 2. Start a blog or write a regular column for a website or e-newsletter.** Online networking works best when you get plenty of "hits." If you can start a blog (basically an online diary) on one of the larger blogger sites or online communities, you'll create more buzz for yourself. Write about things that interest you or that highlight your expertise. Write in a way that helps others by sharing your expertise. As people read your content and become familiar with you, they'll feel like they know you and that's integral to the networking process. Becoming an expert in an area and writing regularly about it can go a long way toward building your online networking opportunities.
- 3. Develop an e-mail newsletter for your own company.** Create an e-mail database of clients, customers and friends, and send them regular content that drives them to your own website. Be sure that your newsletters contain content that has a broad spectrum of interest about your business. You might want to encourage clients and customers to contribute to your content. In doing this, you'll build stronger relationships with them, which in turn will help you increase the amount of referrals you'll receive.
- 4. Never forget that online networking is still about developing trust.** With online networking, the bottom line is still the same as with live networking. In order to drive business to your company by word of mouth, you must focus on developing real, personal relationships with people. Once you've established that foundation of trust, you'll feel comfortable referring people--and so will your network. The same holds true with online networks, although it may take a bit longer to develop that trust over the internet.

Although there really are no short cuts, technology has made it somewhat more convenient to connect with many more people. That being said, We cannot stress enough that those connections aren't terribly valuable if there isn't trust, respect and friendship



Online
networking
allows you
to broaden
your reach
to anywhere
in the world

being established. One place that teaches that online is www.NetworkingCommunity.com. This website is part of the www.CoachVille.com community but is open to coaches and non-coaches alike. At NetworkingCommunity.com, they teach people about social capital and networking, and they do it in an online community setting.

- 5. Understand that online networking has its own cultural norms.** It's much easier to get "flamed" online than in face-to-face networking. Let me explain. If you were to ask a total stranger to do business with you in a face-to-face setting, it's pretty difficult for the stranger, because of cultural norms, to respond in an aggressive manner. Mind you, they're still not likely to feel comfortable with your request, but they probably won't act visibly upset.

None of those cultural pretences exist online, however, and people tend to be much more blunt when responding online than in a face-to-face meeting. With online networking, I think that people feel it's easier to be more direct. The problem is that the response is also more direct and may come across as aggressive or antagonistic. So be careful whom you approach--build a relationship before you ask for someone's business.

Online networking gives you breadth in your networking efforts. It allows you to broaden your reach to anywhere in the world. Just don't forget that trust and relationship building are still as important as ever.



BNI
(Business Network
International),
helps Indian
entrepreneurs
overcome
challenges in a
systematic and
structured way

BNI® – A case study in Networking in India

By Niiraj R Shah

Enterprising businesses in India are being challenged to get out of bed earlier to market their services. BNI, the organisation that has helped more business owners and corporate leaders to grow through word of mouth and referrals than any other single organisation in the world, is now in India, and growing fast!

Tapping all needs

“I need more business. And reliable suppliers!”

“I’m tired of training sales staff and need help improving my skills.”

“I require professional expertise, but I’m not sure whom to trust.”

Business Network International (BNI) helps Indian entrepreneurs address these challenges in a systematic and structured way.

Growing your business the old-fashioned way

A big challenge for entrepreneurs is ensuring a continuous flow of business. BNI helps members generate business the old fashioned way - word of mouth. With tremendous results! Last year (2009), BNI helped nearly 125,000 members in 43 countries generate over ₹11,700 crores worth of business. It works!

In India, BNI has been the pioneer in Business Networking. Last Year alone BNI members have done ₹111.3 crores of Business among with various members spread over three cities, Mumbai, Bangalore and Pune

The BNI®
Handy Guide to Networking





Each member of the group starts out by giving a short presentation about their business, ending with a catch line or a 'memory hook'!

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So, how does it work?

Members at the Indian chapters have responded very enthusiastically. An example is the BNI Alpha chapter at Sun'n'Sand Hotel in Juhu. Weekly meetings take place over breakfast, all at 8am, and last for just 90 minutes. Any trade or profession is represented by one member only. This avoids potential conflict of interests.

The meetings are very structured. Each member of the group starts out by giving a short presentation about their business, ending with a catch line or a 'memory hook'! This is aimed at constantly updating and reminding members about others' businesses and one printer promptly said, "I print anything but currency!"

At these BNI meetings, Indian businesses network, very effectively, with an eclectic mix of professionals, such as accountants, lawyers, financial advisors, computer hardware suppliers, auto mechanics, corrugated carton suppliers and central air-conditioning companies, and so on.

Then come the referrals - the real reason for the meeting. The system is formal and monitored for performance. You pass on details of someone, who you know is in need of a fellow member's services, but only after speaking to that person. The BNI Alpha chapter in Juhu passed an average of 80 referrals per week, during May 2010. This group of 44 members has generated over ₹6 crores of business in last 6 months. It is important to stay committed to the group because members must get to know you and trust your abilities enough, to make referrals.

Advantage BNI

Every member at any BNI chapter is a senior decision maker or director in a company and having such persons introducing you to other decision makers, works as a powerful sales force! "In times when good sales people are hard to find and costly to retain, the BNI system offers entrepreneurs from small and medium businesses, a distinct advantage!" says Niiraj R Shah, National Director of BNI India.



BNI offers
monthly trainings,
helping members
develop key
business skills such
as communication,
presentation,
management and
leadership

←-----→

A virtual advisory board

BNI members not only bring each other new business, they also each other with business and professional support, sharing their woes and offering practical advice. As William Pinto, a chocolate manufacturer and a member of Andheri chapter says: “I have 50 members in my chapter - it’s like me having 50 branch offices across Mumbai”

Training - the edge over others!

BNI offers monthly trainings, helping members develop key business skills such as communication, presentation, management and leadership skills, which help stay ahead of competition. This is one of the core strengths of the organisation. The training sessions give members from different chapters, an opportunity to meet and extend their network. Bakul Shah, an office furniture dealer and member of the Andheri East chapter, says, “A referral from a Juhu chapter member helped me crack a deal for ₹92 lakh! (US\$ 200,000) ”

There has to be a lot in it to get someone out of bed for an 8am meeting. Week after week! There are no funny handshakes here- just big monetary rewards for serious business people willing to participate in the spirit of BNI.

To learn more about BNI call:

+91-22-26051639 or e-mail: twinkle@bni-india.com or Visit www.bni-india.com



Social media
tools
out there
can help you
collaborate,
communicate &
network better

Cool Social Media Tools to collaborate, communicate & Network better...

I have to say I was amazed when I heard the other week that Dell has generated over US\$1 million in revenues through using [Twitter](#) (to read more about this click on this [link](#)). Twitter has been making waves in the last few months on the social media scene and many people swear by it. I've been using it for a couple of months now, but it's only now dawning on me how useful it could be. I thought I would give you a low down on 4 important social media tools out there that can help you collaborate, communicate & network better.

Twitter

What is [twitter](#)? Well simply put it is a micro-blogging tool that allows people you may be connected to (think customers, vendors, potential target markets, colleagues, etc) to engage with you in conversations. You might be familiar with status update that you can post about what you are doing right now on the social networking site [facebook](#) or business networking sites such as [LinkedIn](#). Twitter is a tool that allows you to give such updates to a community of users following. Twitter becomes more valuable as you get more relevant followers to connect, share and network. Dell used it to let its customers who were following it on twitter get news of special discounts available at stores. I use it to let people know about updates to my blog or other BNI related news. I also use it to follow other excellent influencers who could update me about key things related to their expertise. For example I have been following [Tomas Power](#) on Twitter where constantly updates it with key news from the world of social media.

You are able to attach links to articles and sites that may be of interest. So for example if you have just come across an interesting article or blog you can post a link to it.



Twitter
has been
making waves
in the last
few months on
the social
media scene and
many people
swear by it

←-----→

The great thing about Twitter is that you can get updates on your mobile phone via sms so you don't need to be logged on to the internet to get your updates. Just make sure that when you follow someone you update your settings to make sure status updates are sent to your mobile device. I only do this for very important people I'm following. To follow me on Twitter click on this [link](#)

Yammer

[Yammer](#) is the equivalent of twitter but for your company. Everyone in your company can get updates and it's like the things you pick up when you meet colleagues around the water cooler. I think this is particularly powerful for collaborating and communicating. You have the added privacy of having your own network.

You can download this on your windows smart phone or Blackberry so you can have it on the move. A friend of mine travels a lot and this is a great way to figure out who has been doing what while he has been away.

I'm just trying this out but I can already see how exciting this is as more people from our company get yammering! J

Hootsuite

One of the major complaints I get about social media is that it takes too much time. Well let me introduce you to [Hootsuite](#), a brilliant little tool that allows you to manage, monitor and post updates on your twitter, LinkedIn & Facebook account. Once you have linked your various accounts to it you don't need to separately login to each different account. One dashboard takes care of it all. It has 4 very cool pieces of functionality

- (a) It allows you to create mini urls for web links that are very big
- (b) It allows you to create post updates in advance and then decide on a date and time when you want it posted.
- (c) It allows you to automate feeds from your blog or any other favourite blog of yours and



Get your
business
much needed
VISIBILITY
by using these
social media
tools!



post them to whichever social media account you want.

(d) It allows you to monitor multiple social media accounts through one dashboard Simple but brilliant! My favourite as it saves me so much time!

In 2010 every business will have to have a social media component built into their overall marketing budget. So have FUN out there and get your business much needed VISIBILITY by using these social media tools!



Technology
is rapidly
changing
the way
we live and
work.
It also helps
you network
better

Using Technology to Network better

By Niiraj R Shah

At a recent networking meeting I met the owner of a housekeeping company after 3 years. I was instantly able to remember her name, profession but also where and when we had met. She was really amazed. It made a great positive impact on her and now I will be etched in her mind. I had a little trick up my sleeve - I had scanned her business card when we had first met and made some extra notes. I had then transferred the data to my Blackberry. Technology is rapidly changing the way we live and work. They can also help you network better. Consider using these 5 gadgets or technologies to take your networking to a new level. They will help you save time and more effectively utilise your network to communicate and collaborate.

1. Card Scanner

The most essential gadget to have is a card scanner. If you regularly take part in trade shows, exhibitions, or networking events than you need a way to manage business cards. I use one by [CardScan](#). It's easily syncs with your contact management software - whether it is Microsoft ® outlook, ACT, Goldmine, Windows mobile device or your Blackberry device.

I like it for two specific reasons:

(a) it allows you to save a card under multiple categories, which are customised by the user. For example I save every business card under a specific profession or industry and the geographical area. So next time I want accounts in Bandra I'm able to search accordingly.

(b) The FREE [CardScan@your service](#) software allows an online back up of your address book so no more worries if your computer falls prey to viruses or is stolen. A neat little feature of the software is that periodically it will send an e-mail to your contacts to confirm



Communicate and collaborate on the go

if their data is up to date. This ensures that your database is up to date. All these features and functionality are well worth the little extra you pay for this scanner compared to others in the market.

2. A Smart Phone

Whether you go for a Blackberry, an iPhone, a Windows mobile or a PALM device I believe its a networking essential. Make sure you pick up one that will sync with your computer. Set it up so that it syncs your contacts and your calendar. Also make sure that you get one with Bluetooth and infra red so that you can also exchange contact details in an easier way. A number of these smart phones have widgets you can download that allow you to sync with your online networks like [facebook](https://www.facebook.com). Communicate and collaborate on the go.

3. Skype

SKYPE is a popular VOIP service that allows you to make FREE Skype to Skype calls over the Internet. Sound quality is good, but it does require broadband for best results. It also has video conferencing using webcams. A cost efficient communication tool for anyone building a global network. Some neat little features include:

- Import your contacts from Outlook and see who is on Skype
- Conference call with up to 9 other Skype users
- Make outbound calls to landlines & mobiles through a paid service
- Share files through Skype
- Use it to send SMS

4. XOBNI - Manage e-mail is a smarter way

An internet savvy friend recently introduced me to this brilliant little plug-in for Outlook which really helps take charge of your e-mail. It's 'Inbox' spelt backwards! It's lightning fast in its search capability. If you spend too much time looking for important e-mails or



No article
on using
technology for
better networking
would be
complete without
mentioning online
business networks



attachments in your inbox then this is a breath of fresh air. [Xobni](#) offers a new way to organize and search your Outlook email. Xobni creates profiles for each person that emails you. These profiles contain relationship statistics, contact information, social connections, threaded conversations, and shared attachments. I love it because I can find out who else is in their network and its links with LinkedIn. It also allows me to see when do they normally send or respond to mails and how many people they have in their network.

5. Online Business Network

Of course no article on using technology for better networking would be complete without mentioning online business networks. There are new ones popping up everyday, however two that I use extensively for helping me network better are [Ecademy](#) and [LinkedIn](#). Ecademy allows me to put a lot more information on my profile. Have a look at mine here: <http://www.ecademy.com/user/niirajrshah> Cool features include knowing who visited your profile so that you can connect with them. You are able to import your e-mail contacts from Gmail, hotmail, and outlook to invite. A neat feature is the net news, which allows you to get an update on what's happening on Ecademy right now. Who is active, who added someone as a contact, status updates etc. Ecademy also has full social media integration.