NETWORKING GUIDE

What exactly is networking?

The idea of networking is sometimes hard for students to initially grasp. They often think it is going up to complete strangers and trying to get an internship or job out of them.

Networking is...
- talking with a person in a job, profession or organization of interest to you,
- an opportunity to ask for information, *not a job,*
- a job searching tool that is planned and organized.

Networking is NOT...
- talking with someone about specific job leads or job openings (at least not at first),
- a chance meeting,
- a job interview.

The reality is that networking needs to be a part of everyone’s search strategy.

We all have an already established network: our immediate family, our extended family, our friends, our friends’ parents, our parent’s friends, our neighbors, the people we work with, our teachers from high school, the people in our churches, mosques, or synagogues, the people we know from community groups and volunteer organizations. Right there we might have 50 people we already have a relationship with. Now you need to figure out what do these contacts do; where do they work and how can they help you get more information about particular job types, employers and industries. To help you get started, be sure to use the CBA Career Services Networking Sheet. Identifying who you know is a crucial first step in networking.

Different Forms of Networking

Networking has traditionally been done in a very systematic and routine way. However, while ‘traditional’ networking is still done at professional and career development events, there are other ways to get more creative in your networking style. Additionally, with the increasing use of technology in today’s business world, make sure you are using social media such as Twitter, Facebook, and especially LinkedIn. If used professionally and correctly, these channels can prove very successful in your networking and job search.

Traditional Networking is widely used among all college students and career service centers at various universities. Traditional networking includes all of the common forms of identifying contacts, reaching out to them, and even setting up informational interviews with them. You would employ a traditional form of networking strategy when you decide to search out all alumni from your college who happen to work in a particular field/industry that you are interested in. After you reach out, it is up to you to foster these relationships into future meetings over coffee, lunch, or to keep it simple, subsequent conversations over the phone.
**Semi-traditional Networking** is a little less common than traditional networking but is a strategy that is used widely by a number of college students who are trying to get into a firm that might not recruit on their college campus. Semi-traditional networking includes strategies similar to traditional, but rather than using your school or an acquaintance as a common link, you can use professional organizations/affiliations as a common link. Let’s suppose that you are on the website of a local firm that does not recruit at your school. Often, these firms will have biographies of the senior management on their website. You can use these short biographies to learn about where they might be from, what they majored in while in college, and then reach out to them. Many students make the mistake of limiting their network to *only* the alumni from their school, however, casting the widest net possible will always prove more valuable.

**Non-traditional Networking** is much less common and rarely used by many students because of the additional work and discomfort that it may cause. Non-traditional networking techniques are highly risky but can be quite rewarding when they pay off. An example of a non-traditional networking technique would be to visit the website of a firm that has no affiliation with your school (i.e. no alumni and does not recruit at your school). You can use the website to your advantage and use the biographies of the senior management as an attempt at gaining their email address. Although you may have nothing in common with these managers, you may want to consider formulating a bulletproof email that states your reason for emailing them, how interested you are in their company, how you believe that you are a particularly strong candidate for a job, and how you are interested in learning more about their firm. Many times this technique will prove to be fruitless and will leave students with a sense of awkwardness, but nonetheless, it can also show a potential employer how dedicated and driven you are. Do not be afraid to attend informational events at other schools if a “dream employer” does not visit your campus. Many times, these host-campus will allow you to sit in on their information sessions.

**Effective Networking Begins with Self-Assessment**

Before you start to network, think about the next step you need to take in defining or exploring a career path. In particular, before you start networking, you need to ask yourself the following questions:

- What is it that you would like or are looking to do?
- Does your past work, internship, or volunteer experiences provide some direction?
- Does your coursework offer an indication toward an area of interest?
- What skills do you possess?
- Is there a general geographical area in which you would like to live?

Defining your career interests will help you focus your networking efforts.

**Identify Your Network**

After you complete step one of the networking phase: identify all of the professional acquaintances that you know, some great opportunities to network during the school year are times like Christmas/winter break, spring break, the CBA Career Conference, alumni events in the Networking Zone, and at various CBA events.

[www.cba.pitt.edu/careers](http://www.cba.pitt.edu/careers)
CBA hosts corporate days in the Sennott Square lobby during the semester, and we have a wide array of employers that attend. Find an employer that you are interested in and start networking!

**Places to Build Your Network**

You have the opportunity to network everywhere and in many different ways. Here are some examples of how you can network.

Informational interviews—an informational interview is an opportunity to talk with someone about a specific career path, job type or employer. These interviews can be done over the phone, through email or in person. Informational interviews are initiated and controlled by you. For more information on this form of networking, see the CBA Career Services Guide to Informational Interviews.

Formal networking events—there are many forms of formal networking events. These can be at job fairs, through professional and student organizations, as a part of a CBA Career Services program or event such as the Career Conference, Explore Programs or employer office hours. In each of these situations, while there may be an overall structure to the program, it is up to you to facilitate the discussions with alumni and employers. It is good to be prepared to open with your 30 Second Sell, have a few questions to ask the contact. It is important to get the business card of anyone you talk to. After the event, send them a short thank you email. In the email, thank them for attending the event and sharing their thoughts with you. For more information, see the CBA Career Services handout, Preparing for a Networking Event.

Job Shadows—once you have established a relationship with someone through your networking, ask to spend a day or half day on the job to “shadow” them. This will give you a chance to see what it is really like to work in that job type. It will help you gain a better understanding of what to expect on the job. By job shadowing someone, you will be able to network with their colleagues, thus expanding your contacts.

Your Job—if you are currently working, this is a great place to start networking. Even if your job isn’t related to your career or major, tap into the people you work with. They can’t help you if they don’t know what you are looking for. Find a way to get to know your colleagues and in turn, their potential network. If you are in any kind of service industry and have regular customers, be sure to engage them in conversations beyond how they take their coffee. Start to build a more professional relationship with them.

**Online Networking Resources**

The Pitt Career Network ([www.alumni.pitt.edu/networking](http://www.alumni.pitt.edu/networking)) is a great resource for connecting with Pitt alums. This is a database of over 6,000 alumni who have created profiles for you to review. You can use the database in one of two ways. The first being a passive approach where you just read the profiles. The second way to use it is to be more active—identify those alumni you would like to get more information from and send them an email. There are sample emails in the Help Section of the database.

LinkedIn.com is a professional networking site. You can start to build your network by creating a profile, recording your experience and looking for people you already know. It is a great way to also see who your contacts are connected to. After any networking interaction you have, be sure to see if the contact is on [www.cba.pitt.edu/careers](http://www.cba.pitt.edu/careers)
LinkedIn. Send them a request to join your virtual network. You can also join groups on LinkedIn.com that are related to your career interest area. Do a search to see what your options are. You should consider joining the CBA group-search for Pitt Business, College of Business Administration and start to be connected to current CBA students, our alumni and key employers.

**Additional Networking Resources**

**Pitt Clubs**-Not from Pittsburgh or thinking about moving to a new city after graduation? Utilize the Pitt clubs that are all over the country. These are alumni located in specific locations who have developed a group, mainly for social purposes. To find out if your city has a Pitt Club, check the Alumni website at: [www.alumni.pitt.edu/clubs](http://www.alumni.pitt.edu/clubs). Contact the president and let them know you are interested in getting more information about their group and when they will be meeting next. These clubs are very excited to have current students join them and share the latest news from campus with their members.

**Professional Business Organizations**-CBA has several student chapters of professional business organizations. We encourage students to join the professional chapters as well. They can often do this at a discounted membership rate due to their student status. By joining the professional chapters, they gain access to additional resources-networking events, professional development opportunities and job postings. CBA Career Services has a list of these organizations-be sure to stop in to pick up a copy.

**Prepare to Network**

Once you have identified the people in your network that can help you, you need to prepare to make sure you are getting the most out of the conversation and connection.

- Be able to talk about yourself and your goals-the more you talk about your skills and interests, what you have done, what you like to do and where you would like to do it, the more likely people will begin to see links between themselves and you. They will begin to share information about their own backgrounds and who they know and where they have been.

- Ask questions! Through networking you have an unique opportunity to gain new perspectives on employers, careers and job types that you might not otherwise have the chance to get. Take advantage of this to ask the questions you have always wanted to know, within reason. Most people are flattered if you ask questions about what they do and how they got there. Everyone has a story; all you need to do is ask them about it.

- Plan for networking. Anticipate when you will be in a position to network and plan what you want to ask, what you want to communicate about yourself and how. Understand the different situations where you can network and what approach you need to take in each situation.
How to Reach Out

What happens after you have identified key people you already know? You need to contact them-call them, send them an email. Something as simple as:

“Hi Mr. Jones,

I am excited to write that I have completed my first year in CBA at Pitt. I have been thinking about what my major should be and what type of job I would be looking for. I have narrowed my majors to finance and general management. I know you have managed your own business and I would appreciate the opportunity to sit down with you and talk about your experience. Getting a first hand perspective would be very helpful. I am free next week . . . . .”

Use this meeting to find out all you can about the industry, and employer of your contact. Be prepared to hear the positives and challenges-no position, employer, industry is perfect. During the meeting ask if you can spend some time with your contact on the job to see what it is really like to work in that industry. Also ask the contact to refer you to other people they may know who would be helpful for you to meet. You will start to expand your network and grow your possibilities. Be sure to send a thank you to everyone you meet with.

At first, you may feel awkward asking for help in this way. Networking is more effective when it is mutually beneficial. For example, you may benefit from networking with an alum because the alum may be able to:

- Give you a better understanding about a particular field of work
- Give you information about a specific job type or about a specific employer
- Give you advice on how to apply for a particular position
- Give you suggestions of other people to talk to

Alumni may benefit from talking with you because:

- You can give them an update on what is happening in CBA and at Pitt
- You can give them a chance to share their opinion about their work and field
- You may be a great candidate for their employer and they may be valued for referring you for employment

Random Networking Interactions

You may find yourself in some random situations (i.e., traveling, at a sporting event) and happen to meet someone who is in the job type or industry you are interested in. After some initial small talk, the person hands you their business card and asks you to follow up with them.

But do they really mean it? And how do you do this?

The answer is YES, they really want you to follow up with them! The first step is to write a well-crafted email in a timely manner, meaning within a day or two after you have met them. Things to include in this email:

www.cba.pitt.edu/careers
- A brief recap of how and when you met the person
- More details on what you are studying, what you might be looking for in the future
- A closing that will include how you will continue to follow up with them
- Attach your resume

An example of this may be:

Dear Mr. Smith:

It was a pleasure to meet and talk with you last week during our flight from Pittsburgh to Chicago. I enjoyed learning about your company, X, and the new global marketing initiatives you are planning.

As a marketing student in the College of Business Administration at the University of Pittsburgh, I am planning on gaining more experience in the area of global marketing, specifically how social networks are influencing broader consumer behaviors. I am looking forward to starting my Social Marketing class in the fall and would love to hear how your initiatives are progressing.

As you requested during our conversation, I have attached my resume. I will follow up with you once I am back on campus. I hope you reached your final destination without any issues.

Sincerely,

Your name

It is important that you continue to work at building all networking relationships. Continue to keep in touch with your contacts every semester. Sending a quick email with how your semester is going and highlighting classes you are taking or projects you are working on that are related to potential employer interests is an easy way to keep them up to date. Also include what your plans are for the summer—if they know you are looking for an internship, they might have one available and be able to share that information with you.

**Networking Summary**

When you begin networking, clearly communicate your qualifications, desired position, and geographic preference. Be clear about your goals. It will be easier for people to help you if they know what you’re looking to find.

When speaking with a contact, avoid simply asking for a job. Instead, mention that you’re interested in a certain industry, and ask them if they have any suggestions about how to approach your job search. Ask them if they know anyone in the industry who might be willing to talk with you—not just about a job, but also about your job hunting strategy. If you show that you are more eager to learn than to use them for a potential job, then chances are that they will be more eager to help you. Good luck!