

# 7 tips to build a network for the new world of work

So many aspects of the way we communicate and work have had to shift online thanks to COVID-19, and networking is no different.

And with a more competitive job market now, building and making use of your network is more important than ever.

But there are plenty of ways you can do this digitally or remotely. Even if you've never done it before or the thought makes you a little uneasy, networking doesn't have to be difficult or overly formal. It's simply a way to connect with people professionally, to share ideas and information – and over time this can build you a support base and even open up opportunities.

Here's a simple guide to networking well in this new environment.

## What does a network look like now?

A network can include your friends and family, past and present co-workers, and tertiary educators says Lois Keay-Smith, online career practitioner at Career Wisdom. It also spans your contacts on social media or other forums, especially those you regularly engage with, even if you've never met face to face. And increasingly in a digital world, it's not just who you're connected to, but who *they* know that further builds and bolsters your network.

## Why networks matter so much now

When times are tough, a network can help you hear of opportunities before they're advertised, and potentially even give you a boost when you're being considered for a role," says Keay-Smith.

If your role has been made redundant or you've lost your job due to COVID-19, let people know that you're looking for work and what you're interested in, and encourage them to keep their ear to the ground, says Linda Jeffrey, National Vice President at the Career Development Association of Australia (CDAA).

"Someone you know may hear of an opportunity they ordinarily wouldn't associate with your career aspirations, so it is important you clarify how wide a net you are casting. Back this up with information on how you are skilled and qualified enough to be considered and ask them to pass this on if they know anyone in these fields," Jeffrey says.

## Seven ways to build your network digitally

The basics of networking are the same online, but Jeffrey says the way we maintain and use our personal and professional networks will benefit from some adjustments in this new digital

environment.

**1. Ensure your online profiles are up to date**

Regularly post interesting content in relevant forums, says Keay-Smith. If you're not one for creating your own, share articles that resonate and add your own thoughts to start a conversation.

**2. Look for ways to expand your support base**

Jeffery says even if you're not actively approaching anyone about a job, it's a good time to start identifying key players in your field and developing relationships with them on social media.

**3. Pay it forward**

You can build new relationships or bolster existing ones by being helpful. Jeffery suggests sharing useful articles or videos with contacts, and sharing their companies' job advertisements through your networks, as well as positively commenting on what they've published or posted.

**4. Be a connector**

Putting people in touch with each other in your network is another great way to be useful, Keay-Smith says. She also recommends asking for introductions from your connections – and always saying thanks when they do!

**5. Keep it concise**

If there's someone you'd like to connect with or 'meet' the way you might have done over a coffee or at an event previously, suggest a quick Zoom meeting or phone call at their convenience, Jeffrey says. "Asking for 15 minutes is good, quick for them, but enough time to be a useful chat. Increase your chance of success with a clear explanation of why you're requesting the meeting, clarify that you are not asking them to give you a job, and would like to ask about steps they would recommend to progress your career."

**6. Prepare and present yourself well**

Even in Zoom meetings, Jeffrey recommends dressing professionally as if you're meeting in person, and being prepared with good questions, a solid idea of their background and a pen and paper for note-taking. "While you should do your own research, I recommend opening with a polite question about their career journey – most people like to talk about themselves, it's a good icebreaker and can be useful in terms of building your own career strategy."

**7. Follow up**

What you do post catch-up can help too, Jeffrey says. “Always thank them for their time, ask if they can suggest any other useful contacts and promptly follow through with any information you’ve agreed to send,” she says.

Digital tools are helping us connect, communicate and enhance our working lives more than ever, and networking is just one way to take advantage of this. Try these tips to build your own professional network – you even might find a support base you never knew existed.