

## Online networking not intended to replace face to face meetings

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The Calgary Herald

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CALGARY - That tried and true method of networking to build your contacts and help land the perfect job is taking a new twist.

Online business networking websites are booming, meaning face-to-face networking is just one way people are expanding their horizons.

As tech savvy, younger generations move through the workforce, online business networking is becoming a popular practice, not just because it allows users to keep in touch at the press of a button, but because it offers the ability to network with anybody, anywhere in the world, according to people who use the services.

"Your net is bigger. If you want to go international, this is a perfect way to keep in contact with people and keep a relationship going," says Jennifer Cummings, a corporate strategist based in Calgary.

Aside from the obvious -- e-mail -- several "social software" sites dedicated to online business networking have emerged in recent years. Cummings uses a popular website called LinkedIn.com, dedicated to the business networker.

Sites such as Friendster and Myspace were popularized by young adults who want to socialize for personal reasons. LinkedIn and similar sites are the logical next evolution of that concept, but tailored to the business crowd. LinkedIn and other sites like it, such as Ryze.com and Tribe.net, require users to sign up, create a business profile -- one that you want other professionals and colleagues to see -- and send out invitations for other contacts to join.

Relying on technology alone, of course, conjures images of people never actually meeting face to face. Webcams, high-speed connections and other technology allow people to meet each other live, so to speak. But even online business networking enthusiasts say it's only one more tool to help boost your career.

"If you have too much technology in your business, you could start to lose touch, so it's really the balance between high-touch and high-tech," says Kelly Gustafson, executive director of Business Networking International's southern Alberta franchise.

The private referral and networking firm is one of the largest business networking organizations in the world. Members develop online profiles, can access any member in



CREDIT: Tim Fraser, The Calgary Herald  
Kelly Gustafson, executive director of Business Networking International in southern Alberta, says the key to networking is balancing high-touch and high-tech.

the world and rely heavily on technology as part of the networking strategy. Each chapter also meets weekly.

Jennifer Beale, an Ontario-based publisher and public relations professional, recently launched Biznetworknews.com, a website that houses a database of networking events across Canada.

"Technology is just another means to reach the people," says Beale. Her success in the Toronto market prompted her to roll out the concept across the country.

Now, she says Vancouver, Edmonton and Calgary are among the hottest networking cities based on volumes of events in her database.

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