

## Starting Point Series

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**YOUR CAREERS SERVICE  
YOUR FUTURE**

# Networking

## Your guide to the hidden job market

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Please ask at the information desk or email  
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# Contents

1.	What you need to know about networking.....	2
2.	Creating and Managing your network .....	4
3.	Using your network .....	5
4.	Example covering letters.....	7
5.	Action Plan .....	10

## What you need to know about networking

Networking is something we all do, to various degrees, in both our professional and personal lives. You might speak to a fellow student for advice about a piece of work, or recommend a good club or restaurant to a friend. Essentially, it is about sharing knowledge and taking the risk away from decision making. It is not exclusive to work and socialising - it is an equally useful strategy when it comes to managing your career.

### Networking and career management:

- For job hunting... For a number of reasons most jobs are never advertised. Advertising is expensive, and it is time-consuming to sort applications and arrange interviews for candidates. Employers take advantage of ways to circumvent this process, either by promoting an internal candidate or by hiring someone otherwise known to them, perhaps from a speculative approach. In some cases, a job might be created to take advantage of your skills and abilities.
- For exploring ideas... A good way of finding out whether a job is for you is to talk to someone who does it and then to get some relevant work experience. It can help you to determine your strategy and spot potential opportunities and gaps in your CV. Using contacts is an excellent way of getting in making yourself known to the right people.

### What you need to know about networking:

To some people, networking is tarred with the same brush as the “old boys’ network”. However, there is one essential difference – networking is not passive, (in that you place your fate in the hands of somebody else); instead it is about someone providing you with information and you acting on it. It is about taking active responsibility for your future.

Networking is not about asking someone directly for a job. It is about asking for advice, information and for the benefit of someone’s experience. Most people respond positively to requests for help – if you approach them in the right way. If you write asking for a job – and the person you contact is not in a position to recruit you – it can sometimes put them in an uncomfortable position. However, if you ask for something that they could provide e.g. a short meeting and the opportunity to talk about routes into a certain occupation, you are more likely to get a constructive response. Ask contacts how they got where they are because people love to talk about themselves. If you show an interest in them, they are more likely to show an interest in you.

It is perfectly natural to dislike some aspects of networking – to some it feels rather underhand to nurture connections with people for your own “ends”. What you need to remember is that networking is rarely a one-way transaction – it may be that later you will be in a position to help those who are helping you.

You also don’t have to pretend to be someone you are not. If you are not naturally an extrovert, devise strategies that fit with your own values and personal style. Work out what you feel comfortable doing, taking only a few tiny steps outside your comfort zone if appropriate.

Networking is about creating opportunities to meet with the right people at the right time. It improves your knowledge about a sector or industry and its associated job market. Employers are receptive to networking as it puts them in contact with motivated, empowered candidates for employment.

### Things to remember:

- It is difficult doing everything on your own. Networking is an effective way of getting help and support, to inform your decisions and to keep you on course.
- There are two types of interview borne of networking - info interviews and networking interviews – the first helps you to prepare for the second.

- Contact people individually – not just an appended list to an email or a mail merged standard letter.
  - Get to know people because you respect them not just because you may get the job – be genuine.
  - Learn the language, terms of reference, values and issues of your particular target area.
  - Get advice from senior people.
  - Everyone you meet knows someone you don't know... yet.
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## Social Networking Sites

The use of social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace have greatly increased over the last few years. There are between 3 million and 10 million users registered in the UK that use these websites and that number is growing.

Although they are great way to catch up with friends and chat informally, from an employment perspective, there has been much controversy over the use of these sites by certain employers to vet candidates. Recent research by *The Times* showed a fifth of employers use online resources to learn more about a candidate, and that almost two thirds of those admit what they found online may affect their decision to recruit individuals. Therefore if you do have a profile on these sites, think carefully about how much you want a potential employer to view – you can still have fun and successfully network, but be aware of your surroundings and how your actions can affect these.

The flipside of this debate is that more and more employers are actively using these sites to promote their graduate and vacation opportunities. It's an informal way to talk to you about who they are and the nature of their work – a popular tool used by employers is the blog page where recent graduates give you an insight into their daily tasks and challenges faced in their roles.

Registering with their social networking sites may mean that you are the first to hear about when and where their company presentations and workshops will be on campus, or you may gain unique access to employees via their online forums/ web chats.

The key point, related to earlier, is to be professional in all your online interactions, just as you would be if you were to meet these employers face to face.

Finally there has been an emergence in work related social networking sites such as [www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com) which provide young professionals with the opportunities build up work contacts and further develop your career upon graduation. Something to consider when making the transition from student to graduate.

## Opportunities for Formal Networking:

Some industries will have formal networking opportunities in place. For instance, professional institutions may have active regional or specialist branches. Within a sector, there will be professional peer groups that meet regularly to discuss issues relevant to their industry. Some of these are listed below. Consider joining professional organisations, even at your own expense – and be an active member: go to meetings, get involved. If nothing else, it will give the chance to meet socially with people who share some of the same interests as you.

Websites such as Friends Reunited are also worth a look. It might be that your best friend at school is now working in the industry you want to target. ([www.friendsreunited.co.uk](http://www.friendsreunited.co.uk))

Take advantage of the tools of the information age i.e. message boards, email groups etc. This might be specific to your job or interests and will put you in touch with a huge pool of potential

contacts. One warning though is to remember that you need to speak to people in person too, not just by email.

You could also consider creating your own “specialist” network. Perhaps in your particular field, there are people who should know each other but don’t. This could be an ideal opportunity to get one off the ground. This could be done online as a message board or locally on a social basis, bring together people with common interests and values.

## Creating and Managing your network

### Creating your network, getting started

#### 1. Start by collecting together a structured list of who you know.

You might like to do this under headings, to assist as prompts. List all family and friends, colleagues, contacts. How have they helped before? Think creatively. If they can’t help, do they know someone who can? Look through your phone books and diary to spark ideas.

#### 2. Keep lists of people you have met on courses or at conferences.

Add other names to the list, people who have been recommended to you or have read about. Think about those people that your contacts know. The brother-in-law of your roommate in halls may work in the City. Your uncle’s neighbour may have spent some time abroad with VSO.

#### 3. Once you have your list, the next step is determining how they can help you.

Try thinking about how they have helped you before. Identify those people on your list who are core members. These people may act as your mentors, people who you can be open with. They may be people who have a positive approach and feed your confidence, people you respect and trust. Earmark those who have done something similar to what you want to achieve, who are where you want to be.

#### 4. Highlight those people who you recognise as being good at networking.

What is it that they do that works so well? Ask them for advice and tips.

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### Managing your network:

- Networking works best when you have it under control - you need a system in order to plan your strategy. If you do it in an ad-hoc fashion, you will miss opportunities, forget to chase up promising leads and it will take longer to work.
- Keep a record of who you contact and when. Keep copies of correspondence on file and keep your address book up to date. Post-its and scraps of paper stuck in your organiser or office drawer WILL go missing! Keep an up-to-date diary of key contacts. Remember to maintain links with people if you change jobs – this might be by dropping them an email or ringing them occasionally. Meet up for a drink and remember birthdays. Networking is about maintaining friendships too.
- Always keep a record of your meetings, including the names/job titles of people you speak to. People are impressed when you remember their name, especially if you only met them once before. Also, if you know someone’s name, it helps you get past an unhelpful switchboard operator or receptionist.

Tip! The action plan at the back of this handout gives you a structure to follow

- Building relationships takes time and so your network will take time to develop, especially if you have not managed it properly before. Seize every opportunity to make new contacts, be it a trade show, employer event or careers fair. You may need to take small risks along the way and occasionally move out of your comfort zone.
- Don't cross anyone off your list – you can guarantee that you'll need to contact them later if you do!

## Using your network

### What do you want to achieve?

First of all, you need to think about what you would like the contact to achieve. Determine a realistic, achievable outcome and plan your approach. You also need to determine the right person to approach. If you are ultimately looking for a job, then don't automatically start with Human Resources or Personnel (unless you want to work in that department, of course). Instead, target the hiring manager, a head of department or a partner, essentially someone else who has the authority – and the budget – to recruit you.

There are two sorts of meeting that might result from networking – the first is to obtain information, the second to engineer an opportunity. It is important to know the difference and to realise that you can't always do both of these at one sitting. The first often informs the second.

You must prepare thoroughly if you are going to get the most out of the experience. Research your contacts thoroughly, their backgrounds and agendas. Research their industry and sector – you need to turn up to the meeting fully prepared. If your intention is to find out about careers in say, TV research, it is not unreasonable for your contact to ask why you are interested in the field, and what you know about it.

Also, think about how might they benefit from speaking to you? There might be an angle you could use.

★ Tip! It is sometimes easier to arrange a meeting when you have something concrete to discuss. So... think laterally and creatively. You could use your dissertation or other project as a way to engineer a meeting. For example, if your dissertation involves transport policy, you could arrange to meet someone from the local authority planning office or an independent consultancy. If you are interested in journalism, you could interview a newspaper editor or TV producer for a student publication.

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### Making Contact

The next major step is determining how you are actually going to make contact...

- It is best to get a referral from a common contact but that is not always possible.
- Think how you are going to get their attention. Be charming but not sycophantic, you want to sound sincere.
- Be professional, show appreciation and be open with your expectations.
- Use an approach that you are comfortable with, too. Not everyone has the confidence to seize up the phone and call a complete stranger. If that is not you, then write first and then follow up with a telephone call.

Phone calls are the quickest way of making contact but they need to be approached carefully. Nine times out of ten, a phone call is an interruption so plan what you will say. You might need to get past secretaries or reception staff. Be aware that you only have a finite amount of time, so plan

accordingly. Remember to be polite and show you appreciate the other person's time is precious – say “Have I called at a convenient time or would you rather I called back later?” Practise a 30-second CV that you can use on the phone.

If you decide to write first, the best letters are targeted and addressed to an individual. Avoid sending out 50 versions of the same letter – it does not work. You need to say why you are contacting them personally, why you are interested in their firm or sector and what you want from them. Be prepared to follow up your letter with a phone call – say so in the letter and make sure you do it.

Tip! Included in this handout is some example networking letters. Download a copy of our Covering Letter handout for more tips!

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### **Guarantee Success!**

The most successful way of using networking is by way of information or advisory interviews. This is low risk on both sides and is comparatively simple to set up. Remember to do your preparation...

- If you are calling the interview, it is up to you to set the agenda – prioritise your needs and be realistic about how much you can cover in the time given.
- Perhaps rehearse your questions beforehand and get some feedback on how they might be received.
- During the interview, you may end up taking the lead. Be enthusiastic and sound interested, listen and make notes.
- You may also need to be quick on your feet and seize opportunities e.g. the possibility of work experience or other possible contacts. Remember your diary if you need to schedule another meeting.
- It goes without saying to thank them for their time too. After the meeting, follow up with a thank you and learn from the experience - what can you improve/do differently next time?
- Make a list of action points to follow up.

If someone passes on a contact to you, make a point of following it up even if you are not convinced. It is common courtesy and will make them more likely to help you in future. Plus, the right people may not always be obvious at first so always keep your eyes and mind open.

You also need to be able to deal with rejection. People will sometimes say no. Take time to understand why – maybe a different approach is required and try not to take it personally. The key sometimes is to be politely persistent. If they are unable to help, can they suggest someone who can, try asking for a referral. If they clearly have no vacancies, let them know that you still value their feedback and advice. Fundamental to making the best of networking is to keep trying and learn from your mistakes. Stay positive and take small steps to improve.

- Be tactful with people – they have probably been approached before and it may not have been well executed.
- Think small – the Managing Director should probably not be the first person on your list. Practice your skills on someone more junior but still pick someone with management responsibilities – set your sights higher than the post-room clerk!
- Don't be presumptuous - a 5 to 20 minute meeting, depending on your contact, is usually enough for starters.

Further Information is available for reference in the Careers Resource Centre:

- ‘The Art of Building Windmills’ Peter Hawkins
- ‘30 minutes ... to improve your networking skills’ H. Catt and P. Scudamore

## Example letter to a “cold contact”

Your address

Date

Company address

Dear Mr Harrison

I write to seek a short, say twenty minute meeting with you in order to tap into your professional knowledge and expertise about future career opportunities in international marketing within the food sector.

You will see from my enclosed CV that in June I will finish my honours degree in Marketing at The University of Manchester. At the end of the degree I intend to pursue a career in marketing. I am particularly interested in the food industry and have a long term ambition to work in an international environment.

I recognise how difficult it will be to secure an initial graduate job in this field and understand the crucial importance of researching the market thoroughly before starting my job search.

I therefore plan to meet briefly with 5 or 6 senior food marketing managers in order to seek their help and advice. I am particularly keen to meet with you since United Biscuits' recent investment in Spain will no doubt open up future international marketing opportunities.

I recognise the time pressures you will be under but would be grateful if you could spare a few minutes to give me your help and advice. I will therefore ring you on Tuesday to arrange a suitable appointment.

I look forward to talking to you.

Yours sincerely



## Example letter to a “referral contact”

Your address

Date

Company address

Dear Mrs McAllister

I write at the suggestion of a mutual friend, Gordon Allison, who as you know is the Assistant Director of the Burrell Museum. Gordon has given me a lot of help in planning my future and he suggested you might also be willing to give me some professional advice at this important stage of my career.

Thanks to Gordon, I have drafted the enclosed CV from which you can see I am very keen to get a job in theatre administration at the end of my degree in June. I know how important it is to target my approach to theatre companies in Scotland and Gordon told me that you are currently the Secretary of the Scottish Theatre Group. He certainly felt that with your 15 years experience in the arts in Scotland your inside knowledge would be invaluable to me.

You will see from my CV that I have already spent the last two summers working as a volunteer at The Citizens and The Tramway and am an active member of the University theatre group.

I realise that your time will be limited, but I would very much appreciate a short discussion with you. May I therefore ring you on Tuesday next week to arrange an appointment to meet?

I Look forward to talking to you.

Yours sincerely

## Example letter using your project network

Your address

Date

Company address

Dear Mr Harrison

### **Marketing Project**

I write to enquire about the opportunities for me to undertake a short project on your behalf during October and November.

You will see from the enclosed CV that I am currently studying for an honours degree in Marketing at The University of Manchester. As an integral part of this course I have to undertake a project. Given that I intend to pursue a career in international marketing in the food industry, I recognise the advantages of this project collaboration with a leading food company such as United Biscuits.

I have already been fortunate in gaining a summer vacation job with Morrisons where I undertook a research study on their out of town superstore development plans. This involved extensive contact with several senior managers and proved I have the ability to undertake project work to a high academic standard with minimal supervision.

I would be happy to undertake the project at no cost to United Biscuits and the supervision would be mainly provided by my academic tutor.

In undertaking a project for you I can offer:

- market research training and degree level marketing experience backed by the resources of our marketing department
- previous project experience in a related food/ retailing industry
- an extra resource to be used at your direction to undertake a project of direct value to you

I recognise that any project I undertake would need to fit with your business needs and offer you benefits to justify your commitment. I would therefore very much welcome the opportunity for a brief 30 minute discussion with you in order to explore the opportunities for collaboration on a joint project in October.

I will therefore ring you in the next few days to arrange an early appointment.

I trust this proposal is of interest to you and I look forward to talking to you soon.

Yours sincerely

# Action Plan

## Network Meetings

Keep a record of your contacts. It will help ensure you make full use of any advice and help you receive once you start to network

Meeting Date	Contact Name	Position Title	Reaction Presentation	Referrals/ Phone No	Opportunities Advice/ Information	Follow Up Action