



Empowered to succeed

Fun-filled yet focused—Satyam BPO espouses the culture of empowering its employees

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Scan it again, computer

T A Balasubramanian on taking biometric technology to new frontiers

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FEATURE

Network for career growth

Professional networking sites have transformed the whole approach for both job seekers as well as job providers, writes

Nivedan Prakash



Users can get connected with people in the same profession, create new contacts, share thoughts, learn trends in the industry, and also it's easy to locate the target audience

Online social networks are a fairly recent phenomenon, though conceptually it has existed for decades. The trick is to replicate real world networking experiences on a digital platform. Sites like LinkedIn, Friendster, and Konnects have tried to do just that. While LinkedIn and Konnects fall under the professional networking silo, Friendster and Facebook are categorized under social networking.

It's a seamless world today. Our interdependencies are varied. Knowledge is no more one person's property. We all know that networking helps one find hidden opportunities and set you apart from the competition. These sites are direct marketing channels. They can spread 'the message' a lot further and faster than passing out business cards and shaking hands at meetings.

Professional networking sites are

one of the "Gen Y" tools that play an important role in today's world and it's helpful to each and every professional at all levels. These sites offer immense business value, basically because of low entry cost. With the markets opening up globally, these sites offer opportunities to leverage professional relationships.

Staying connected has become a de facto requirement in today's era and sites like LinkedIn and Facebook are facilitating just that. These sites are a platform for the tech savvy youth to socialize as well as use them for professional purposes. For example, LinkedIn allows users to search for people using keywords and even get in touch with them and allows messages to be sent to them, for professional purposes without getting into each other's personal lives by not having to divulge personal details.

Professionals today are steadily

waking up to the benefits of being part of a social networking platform. Over the last couple of years, networking sites have become an integral way for individuals to remain connected—with colleagues, superiors and even their competitors.

Today an online profile can easily be seen as a 'virtual business card'. The owner's profile is his introduction to the virtual world for building his own network. Another advantage of being part of such platform would be to aid recruitment in companies. People can recommend friends/acquaintances within organizations and also to the community at large. Sites like LinkedIn even allow recruiters to post recruitment ads at a low cost and high return given the nature of the viral network it is able to reach out to.

However, many of these business applications remain inadequate to make new business contacts and are often misused to send spam, as a result these are considered more of a distraction than a boon. Thus, though these sites open more doors for networking there is still a lot of progress to be made and business networking online remains a thing of the future.

Are these sites effective?

Professional networking sites are always effective when it comes to business. It helps in connecting with people from remote corners of the world and users can form their own professional groups. They can also share thoughts and post questions for response.

Users can get connected with people in the same profession, create new contacts, learn trends in the industry, and also it's easy to locate the target audience. They are also effective tools for business generation as they provide good opportunities to find new business leads, competitive intelligence and new business information.

Prashant Bhatnagar, Director Hiring, Sapient India, said, "We at Sapient see professional networking sites becoming a vital tool of business with increasing number of professionals signing on them. They are a good platform for being introduced to candidates for job offerings and, to prospective clients and ▶

► partners. They also serve as a good source to share knowledge with peers, professionals and experts.”

Business networking sites have surely shrunk the world today. Sites like LinkedIn, Techtribe, Friendster, and Xing amongst others bring many advantages to users and some of the important benefits of these professional websites are—these sites help people in enhancing their networking particularly with similar career track people; help recruitment teams in poaching talent; provide a common platform to like-minded professionals to share and contribute their professional experiences, career aspirations, interests, industry happenings, hobbies, etc.; and helps people in enhancing their knowledge base of a particular skill by joining specific communities/groups and participating in them.

Besides, these sites are becoming an integral part of a professional's daily life today. It helps to build a network that can be critical when growing one's business. It also helps in just bouncing a query off another professional for a second opinion. As always, the Web provides with ample ways to get information and through networking sites there is a possibility of identifying talent. It gives a credibility factor and you get to know the behavioral aspect and preferences. Also, it helps in gauging the pulse of the organization in addition to the other channels of information.

Ravi Verma, President and Global Head-Human Resource, Nucleus Software, asserted, “They are not just a networking site but making connections and developing the knowledge of the most recent swings of the industry. Since professionals and corporate mostly use it,

they help in getting high quality business leads. We see it adding value to the company by significantly changing the distribution channels for communication, empowering one to publish their voice and bolster the communication strategies, engaging the client base and prospective employees.”

“This is a trend catching on fast. It is being used by recruiters to get to candidates. Though it is early to replace traditional recruiting options, but must say, it is a good 'add on' to other means of e-recruitment. Other than that, it is a good way for professionals to connect, other than meeting face to face at forums and conferences,” added Mona Gupta, Senior Manager-Human Resources, Cincom Systems India.

Professional sites also help us to be in distinct professional communities. This is beneficial to garner information about the latest industry trends and market scenario. Networking with likeminded people has its advantages. It enhances learning and understanding of the domain one belongs to through interacting and sharing business information. We not only grow our own business through participation, but also help others to grow their businesses. It is a win-win situation.

These sites are very effective in building professional networks, as they are important platforms for both individuals as well as businesses. They also help organizations in being cost effective and in streamlining their hiring plans.

Career progression

The rapid growth of professional networking sites is a proof that these are taken seriously by the



Amit Prasad
CEO AND FOUNDER MD, SATNAV TECHNOLOGIES

People are asking to be recommended by their previous bosses and are trying to ensure that they keep this updated. But the efforts to upgrade the knowledge base are still not visible, as workforce in India believes that they don't need to learn to contribute more, just focus on earning more year after year

users today. For example, if any user has 200 people in his first line contacts, then his third level contacts would reach up to five million users or more in LinkedIn. This means the coverage or reach of these sites are enormous. Moreover, an increasing number of professionals are leveraging social networking and professional networking sites for career growth. The savvy ones also use these sites for building their database of contacts, which proves useful when the time comes for a change.

Mayank Bhansal, Senior Analyst-Presales, Empower Research Knowledge Services, said, “They are being taken seriously as people on these sites, including their work profile. Also, it's great to come across other companies in the same field and find new opportunities as many human resource professionals and job consultants contact for job opportunities on these sites frequently. In the answers section of LinkedIn, one would find useful information on various professional interests to increase one's knowledge base.”

The ever-increasing user base of these sites, the number and quality of questions the professionals put there, and even larger responses that these questions generate, the large number of groups present, their membership base, the discussions initiated at these groups are all good indicators that users are taking these sites seriously in their career progression.

The total number of registered users on these sites is itself an indication of the success. Nowadays jobseekers are very smart and demanding so they try to gather as

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Iti Kumar
AVP-PEOPLE DEVELOPMENT, GLOBALLOGIC

It is true that for starters, it is hard to build an online networking. The approach of starters should be to follow all discussion threads closely and contribute and participate in the discussions wherever applicable with proper logic and reasoning



Marcel Parker
CHAIRMAN, IKYA HUMAN CAPITAL SOLUTIONS

For recruiters, social networking sites come to the rescue when one is looking out for candidates having niche skills or for roles based in alien geographies. Whereas job sites are focused on a particular motive, which is to facilitate an employment

much information about the employer through current or ex-employees and ensure that they are joining the right company. All users on these sites share their unbiased views in the discussion forums, which is an easiest way for any jobseeker.

Over the course of the last couple of years, professionals have been increasingly using this as a tool to further their career. With the number of opportunities available online, it becomes relatively easy for them to pick and choose a desired career move. More importantly however, it also allows them to network with people who will guide them into making the right career move as well.

Rajita Singh, HR Head, Broadridge Financial Solutions India, is however, of the view, "At times security/trustworthiness cannot be guaranteed and there is a tendency for people not to focus too much on serious aspects and the Web doesn't have the personal touch so on the mentoring aspect it does give a miss."

Adding further, Amit Prasad, CEO and Founder MD, SatNav Technologies said, "This seems to be happening with regular occurrence now, more than ever before. People are asking to be recommended by their previous bosses and are trying to ensure that they keep this updated. All this is very good, but the efforts to upgrade the knowledge base are still not visible, unfortunately workforce in India believes that they don't need to learn to contribute more, just focus on earning more year after year."

Meanwhile, N V Rajan, Senior Vice President-Human Resource, Infinite Computer Solutions feels that in western countries this

concept has become popular as it provides one with a channel to plan one's career by taking inputs from other like-minded professionals and specialists in that given area. However, the same doesn't hold true in the Indian context as of now.

In comparison to job sites

Professional networking sites and job sites each has its own merits. While usual job sites help you reach out to a large number of prospective candidates, the employer can be spammed with innumerable resumes from unqualified candidates. Professional networking sites help you to evaluate prospective candidates better. The recommendations they receive from past and present employers as well as their peers, the kind of business groups they subscribe, the type of discussions they participate in and the responses that they give, are a good yardstick for measuring the quality of prospective candidates.

In some cases, professional networking sites are better than job sites for hiring middle and senior level passive job candidates. These sites also help employers in professional reference check. The sites give an option to a job seeker to explore more opportunities in comparison to job sites.

Romit Dasgupta, Director, GlobSyn Group and Primary Contact for India Konnects, said, "The professional networking sites are more effective than the usual job sites. The basic difference is that job sites offer a uni-directional flow of information, where as in sites like these, the information flows both ways."

Marcel Parker, Chairman, Ikya Human Capital Solutions, asserted, "For recruiters, social networking sites come to the rescue when one is



Ravi Verma
PRESIDENT AND GLOBAL HEAD-HUMAN RESOURCE,
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Professional networking sites are a great tool for meeting people, making connections and developing the knowledge of the most recent swings of the industry. Since professionals and corporate mostly use it, they help in getting high quality business leads

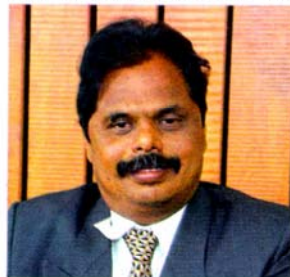
looking out for candidates having niche skills or for roles based in alien geographies. For instance, if an IT services firm wants to hire a regional head for its Media and Entertainment business based in Boston, it won't find much value in uploading this position on job sites and that's where networking sites come into play when one is looking for candidates for roles based in far-off places."

Both have their pros and cons. Job sites are focused on a particular motive. And that is to facilitate an employment. Only two types of people participate actively i.e. the job seekers and the job providers. Job sites act as mediators between them. However, being a member of a professional site opens a wide range of opportunities.

"Job sites are much more reactive than social networking sites. A job site is just an outlet for reaching out to prospective employers and employees, whereas a professional networking site offers much more than an online resume. As a recruiter, I would like to know more about an individual than merely his resume. By looking at their professional and personal contacts, one can get a deeper insight into their personality, which will also answer whether or not they will blend into the organization," added Sanjay Kamrani, Co-CEO, Pangea3.

On the other hand, these sites are great to find quality passive candidates or find candidates from a competing company, but not for large volume requirements one may have. They are also more time consuming compared to job sites as the contact details of candidates are not available immediately to you but you need to persuade the candidates

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N V Rajan
SR VICE PRESIDENT-HUMAN RESOURCE, INFINITE
COMPUTER SOLUTIONS

In western countries, this concept has become popular as it provides one with a channel to plan one's career by taking inputs from other like-minded professionals and specialists in that given area. However, the same doesn't hold true in the Indian context as of now



Mayank Bhansal
SENIOR ANALYST-PRESALES, EMPOWER RESEARCH
KNOWLEDGE SERVICES

The sites are being taken seriously as one would find detailed profile of people on these sites, including their work profile. Also, it's great to come across new opportunities as many human resource professionals and job consultants contact for job opportunities

to show interest in the job and then they are willing to share their contact details.

Definitely networking sites do provide many benefits to its users, but at the same time these sites have not yet become the substitute of job portals. Job portals still have a huge data bank which is missing in the case of networking sites. Job portals still play a crucial role in the recruitment process for almost all companies and are one of the primary sources for targeting "prospective employees".

Meanwhile, there is one interesting point that needs to be mentioned here—networking cannot substitute for good job search and vice versa. The database dedicated jobs sites can never be substituted by any other model of search. They will continue to have their focus because people who come there have already started looking to hire or to switch jobs. Today getting the right manpower is just like finding needle in the haystack. The alternate models though can definitely contribute to help and add value in the process of filling up the critical positions where the traditional databases exhaust.

Other benefits of these sites

The professional networking sites allow users to find jobs or potential employees, consultants and business partners. They also help users in finding professionals, business opportunities and poten-

tial employees. The search option on these sites allows human resource professionals and job consultants to find suitable candidates and contact them with new job opportunities.

One can also search for consultants and business partners by searching for them in professional interest groups within the site and searching from the people search option on these sites. Many consultants and business professionals list their full profile allowing one to review the relevance before contacting them. The user can also search for profiles of people who could be contacted with service offerings of the company or find people useful as business consultants and occasionally look for new jobs.

Mathew Joshua, Head-Corporate Communication and India Relationship, IBS Software, said, "Besides job postings and alerts on these sites, another credible way is word-of-mouth referrals which sites like LinkedIn enable. Many of our customers have recommended us to key people in the industry, which acts as a huge plus. Also, many of the opportunities are discussed online and the online customer or a prospect would gain more in the process."

Moreover, these sites also act as a good tool to tap passive candidates who are not actively looking for a job opportunity. Most of the candidates do not know when to change, they don't know their capability. These sites can be used as a medium to educate candidates and make him a potential candidate for the job.

There might be times when individuals won't make an active effort to go in for a job switch. However, this does not mean that they are not open to a change. In India, the propensity for change for professionals is much higher than in most other countries. There is also a perception that passive candidates turn out to be more vital than active candidates. Even though a candidate is not actively looking for a change, these sites will provide him with an outlet to tap into distributed knowledge, an important aspect for his career growth, both within and outside of his current company.

Meanwhile, for starters, it is hard to build an online relationship but they can utilize these sites to build their own network. Starters should use such networking sites to establish strong strategic relationships that grow with their company initially.

Freshers can create profile in the site and can start networking with people. Every experienced individ-



Sanjay Kamrani
Co-CEO, PANGEA3

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ual will definitely allow freshers to be part of his network. Active participation in discussion forums will help him to learn more and become familiar with people in the group.

Iti Kumar AVP-People Development, GlobalLogic, explained, "It is true that for starters, it is hard to build an online network. Not everyone is interested to accept the relationship of any new user. The approach of starters should be to follow all discussion threads closely and contribute and participate in the discussions wherever applicable, with proper logic and reasoning. This helps to gain visibility and in turn enhances networking. Also, starters should avoid sending connection requests to everyone." The approach should be to first get to know about the person and in case the person shares the common background in terms of career, profile, experience etc., only then should he be approached.

"Starters can find their school/college friends, current/ex-employees on these sites through different communities and advance search. Starters can also join the groups/communities of the same field/interest, it helps in building the network and increasing the knowledge. Orkut is one great site for freshers," added Indrajit Sen, AVP-HR, Aricent.

Though it may take time to build the network of contacts initially, the effort will bear fruits in the long run. To start with, they can add current and ex-colleagues to their network, add clients, vendors, etc., next and eventually, request present contacts to introduce them to the desired network of people. ■

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Advantages & disadvantages of professional networking sites	
Advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ A tool for people to interact and build contacts, carries references and comments ■ Finding passive candidates or finding candidates not available on job sites ■ Get candidates from competitors and also find candidates from companies, one may not be aware of, with good talent of interest to the company's business needs ■ Cost-effective compared to the costly subscription fees of job sites ■ Approachability of candidates is much higher as compared to any other source of recruitment
Disadvantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Overexposure and constant monitoring, especially when there's an overload of information ■ Still to get the seriousness/credibility needed. People don't use it to much for doing business yet. Used more to get data/details ■ Loss of productive time, shift of focus, and obvious peer pressure ■ Sometimes decisions are taken without meeting the person face to face, that might work against a company which has a strong culture ■ Because the reach is more, all professionals are usually sitting with multiple job offers, therefore the attrition is higher