

As seen in *Planned Giving Mentor, The Newsletter for Newcomers to Gift Planning, April 2009 issue.*

# Online Networking for Gifts

---

By Jean Craig Long

*Your network is your net worth*-- Tim Sanders, former Chief Solutions Officer at Yahoo!

"Here, I have the name of someone with that expertise," replied the financial advisor to a question about a pending gift of real estate. With that, she rapidly typed a name into the search window of an online professional networking site and in seconds, emailed an introduction for me to someone in her professional network that she knew could answer my question.

"I get pinged all day long by incoming emails alerting me to the latest legal and regulatory changes," explained a planned giving asset manager for a community foundation. She spends the first hour or so of every morning answering emails from planned giving professionals about such changes. This way the gift planner's time is maximized and not totally absorbed at the computer.

These are two examples of resourceful gift planners using online professional networking sites to build vast networks of contacts and advisors. It's the 21<sup>st</sup> century rolodex and not only is it faster, its potential is global. Why is this important?

A gift planner's world is all about relationships. From donors who also want income from their charitable gifts such as charitable gift annuities and charitable remainder trusts, to well-connected board members, to other gift planner colleagues, lawyers, specialists in real estate and charitable legalities, and more, a network of knowledgeable contacts who provide the expertise they need.

Since major gifts frequently involve a combination of assets and it can take months to work out the details, a team of knowledgeable allies is important to keep the process moving smoothly.

Online technology is redefining the way resource networks benefit gift planners. Unlike some social networking sites for personal use, LinkedIn is an example of a networking site used for business purposes only. You're being connected by people you already know and who know you. Instead of being introduced to someone around the corner, you may meet someone in the next state or continent whose experience becomes the innovative solution you need.

Consider the potential of online networking for cultivating new donor markets. Ask a young professional to set up your online network for others who are interested in getting involved in your mission as volunteers. Just starting their careers, young professionals may not have much cash to give away, so they can name your nonprofit as beneficiary of their retirement plan for 5 percent and their parents or spouse for 95 percent. Now, as volunteers and planned gift donors, you've got a rather large window of opportunity in which to cultivate interests and leadership skills.

Do you:

- need to find an environmental inspector to check-out a proposed gift of real estate in another county? You can search for a colleague or real estate connection in that locale who may know of someone.
- need a prospecting and research tool? You can search to see if someone in your network is connected to that company, foundation, or business person you're interested in meeting. This eliminates the need for cold calls!
- want to maximize career opportunities? As a gift planner with aspirations, you can use the discussion board to show your knowledge of the field and develop relationships. You can also create your own profile to be reviewed by someone searching for your skills.

Online networking is another tool for the resourceful gift planner and in about 15 minutes, you're set up. Then, the power of technology supports your reach around the world. Final tip: for more information, ask the young professionals.