

# ESSENTIAL TOOLS NEEDED TO GET RESULTS AND THRIVE FROM YOUR NETWORKING

## MODULE 10

## Module 10 – Building and Growing

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## Building Your Networking Community Online: Mistakes VAs Make

When it comes to networking online it's very important that you are using this marketing medium to connect with your offline network.

- The one mistake I find many VAs have made is that they meet people at a networking meeting then they fail to connect with them online, therefore missing out on further developing the relationship;
- VAs will not always use online marketing and networking as a form of marketing and therefore could be missing out on thousands of pounds of business;
- Many VAs don't know how to converse with their network online and will either oversell or completely undersell their services;
- Some VAs make the mistake of just networking online and never making the investment to combine the online and offline together which means they fail to make new connections or to build the existing ones.

Let's look at ways to ensure you create the best strategy for stretching your networking to the online arena.

## How to Create and Stretch Your Network

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***Networking online is just as important as face-to-face networking and follows the same rules of building relationships.***

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You can use online networking to create and increase your visibility as well as to establish connections with other people. The quality or strength of your online network or social network can have an effect on how far ahead your business will go. The reason is because you have the opportunity to connect with people all over the world and tap into the connections of people you already know.

It's a great idea to look at where your niche (or target) market is networking online. Some may be members of industry associations which include online forums or networking platforms. If you are not familiar with which these are then ask around.

As part of your VA business, you will be doing social media to promote your own business. Online networking is just an extension of that; your social media. You don't need to create new accounts or profiles for the sake of it (and generally you don't need more than one account on a platform but you do need to ensure your profiles should be like your website; first of all, identifying who you support, so your niche market, then state the results you help them to achieve and how. You should

also use key words included in the profile so that when they conduct a search, your details will come up.

**Action:**

1. Create a social media profile, if you haven't already done so, on the social media networks your ideal client uses.
2. Start investigating specific online groups where your niche will be networking, check for any websites or industry specific organisations.

## Online Networking – Is It a Waste of Time?

Some people think social media is a waste of time, or they say “I don't have time to get round to doing it”, but if you think about how many people you could get exposed to online, obviously in a positive way, it's actually far greater than what you would be able to achieve in terms of the number of people you would meet if you were going to your local networking. Now the good thing about local networking is that you're meeting people who will know people who know people, potentially anywhere in the world, not just restricting it to the UK. And many of those people will be online as well, so they would be talking about you... wouldn't they?!

I'll give you a scenario. Let's say I went to a 4Networking meeting on Tuesday morning, and afterwards the membership coordinator for the group tweeted using my Twitter ID, including a couple of other people, to say “what a great meeting”. Let's say she has 3,500 followers. Now all those 3,500 followers saw my Twitter ID, they also saw the other three people that were mentioned.

Then, my followers and those other three people she mentioned in her message, each have followers of their own. This could range from about two to 46,000 +++ people each, who in turn saw my ID in the message and liked or re-shared. How many people now have seen it....?

Therefore, by attending that networking meeting, my business has now been exposed to an infinite number of people all over the world, most of whom I have never met! This has now instigated more followers, because if they trust the membership coordinator's judgment in people and know that she will only be mentioning people worthwhile following, it encourages people to follow me. Know, like and trust!

So it's really interesting how it works. It's almost like a (very good!) virus, once you catch on to it, it's very addictive, but viral in terms of the fact that more and more people get to see you. Now tell me it's a waste of time.

## Adopt a Strategy and Make the Time

The first thing to bear in mind is that online marketing is a really important part of your overall marketing strategy, and it's vitally important to create time for it. Like with anything, it's not about the fact you don't have the time, it's about self-management. Otherwise you're missing out on opportunities.

In all honesty, you only need to spend five minutes, twice a day. That's all really you need to spend. This could include some time in the morning, mid morning or even lunchtime, and maybe then in the evening.

Ensure that if you are scheduling automatic messages that you also make time to have 'live' conversations also – the automatic scheduling does not absolve you from having to go in and be social.

The best way is to look at your schedule, and whether you are working part-time or fulltime, think about when you can interact. So, if you know your ideal client is on social media at a time when you cannot be – schedule content that goes out at that time, but go back in and interact with the person later in the day, when they have commented/liked/shared your materials. Perhaps you could spend some time doing this when travelling home or while cooking dinner etc. When you get into the habit of it, you do find it so much easier to stick to that habit. So that's the first thing.

## People You Want to Connect With

The next action I would take is to think about the people you want to connect with, whether they be prospective clients, friends, networking buddies, fellow VAs, people who also provide a service to the industry you want to attract as clients etc.

On Twitter and via LinkedIn you can start to follow and connect with people in the area of interest, for example, you want to work with people in the world of fitness and nutrition, you will start to follow people in this area. Bear in mind that with LinkedIn there has to be some sort of official common ground to connect as you are supposed to know the person you are connecting with (but the reality is most don't!). Either you have already spoken to them, met them at a networking meeting, worked with them in some capacity or through a referral. But certainly, as you start to follow them you can get involved in their conversations, you can retweet (Twitter) or share (LinkedIn) some of their messages that you think would be useful for other people to see who are following you.

Then what you witness happening is they start to notice all of that, and they will begin to answer back in terms of a conversation rather than answer back with just a response, and before you know it you have formed some sort of friendship, almost like a Twitter friend. It's the same as going to a networking meeting only with shorter messages!

Now you can't always guarantee that just because you follow someone that they will follow you back, if they do then that's brilliant.

Perhaps you can get involved with the other person's Twitter discussion, maybe retweeting some of their messages and promoting them on a Friday as a person to follow you can use the hashtag #FF which is for Follow Friday. Most people will respond to you and thank you for the retweets and #FF!

By doing it in this way, you are building up an element of trust and it shows you are not spamming them – just being a good digital citizen. It could be that you are recommending her to other people. You can use messages such as “I have read [insert Twitter ID] blog today on [insert site]. Absolutely fantastic! Here is the link to read it”, and you can put in the link so other people can read it too.

So it's thinking about ethical ways of supporting others, getting involved in discussions and retweeting messages, all over a period of time.

### **What to say?**

To be honest, the best way many people learn is by watching what other people are saying, then trial and error. There are people you will see who are constantly selling, and others you will see that now and again, they will drip feed information about what they do, but most of it is simply by having discussions. They may be giving useful information and linking back to their blogs. You'll get a feel for that. I did exactly that, I followed people for quite a while and just watched as a spectator before getting involved. Ensure you are following the 80/20 principle. 80% conversing with people, giving useful tips and information, 20% selling.

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***What do you think your ideal clients would like to read?  
What would you finding interesting to read?***

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## **Know What You Want and What You Can Offer**

Why do you think it's important to build a community online as well as in person?

How do you see it working well in conjunction with your face-to-face networking?

You have to be forthright when networking online, which I appreciate is not always something that feels natural to do. Many people dislike networking because they think it's imposing by asking for help. However, it is all down to how you approach someone, and to remember that people do like to be asked for advice or support.

Imagine you are making a request from one of the people you have only got to know very briefly but you want to conduct some research with them for your marketing purposes as they fall into your niche market - you want to ensure they don't feel like you are trying to sell to them - so how would you approach them and what would you say?

Whenever you are making a request, plan what you want to say and ensure it is reasonable. But remember that when you do so, you should also start to think how you too can offer something in return.

This could be a contact you could be introducing them to, sharing tips, learn more about their business so you can think about referrals etc. If you are following their conversations and taking time to look at their blog posts or even what they are asking in any of the groups, you will gain more of an insight into what would be helpful to them.

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***Never promise anything that you may not be able to deliver.  
You will gain the reputation of being unreliable.***

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### **Contact the person privately**

When you have got to know someone, send a warm introduction to them about you but avoid any sales. See where you can make a connection for example, they may have a similar interest to you or children the same age or have recently been on holiday where you also wish to go. Perhaps mention something about a recent blog of theirs you have read and your comments.

When approaching a potential contact, ensure that you are friendly, respectful and keep it short. Be clear if you are making a request. If they say they're busy at the moment, be aware of that and perhaps suggest a brief phone call at a later time or even to meet at a networking meeting which you both attend. Remember to send a thank you note when they have helped.

Even if you feel like the relationship could be going somewhere, manage your expectations; you will be disappointed if you are expecting something immediately as you have to allow for the relationship and trust to build over a long-term basis.

### **Follow up more than once**

If your contact gave you advice or suggested people to speak to or an action to take, keep them informed of the outcomes or the progress you are making.

Just remember that people can get hundreds of emails every day, so it is best to connect within the online networking message system or forum. However, instead of just giving a one-off report, keep in touch on a regular basis. Give the opportunity to allow the relationship to develop.

Keep getting involved in the group discussions and, where possible, give testimonials to the people who have helped you so that you create awareness to others that this is a genuine and worthwhile business person to know.

### **Connect after you've met**

When you've attended a networking meeting, be sure to follow up online after the meeting, or at least a day afterwards, with those people you connected with or had a one-to-one with.

Imagine now that you are preparing to send a message via a private message system in LinkedIn with someone you met at a networking meeting yesterday... what would you like to say?

Link with them on LinkedIn, follow them on Twitter and or Facebook and state something from the conversation you had discussed or something you promised you would send them or follow-up with. Be sure that anything that is private is not put out in public of course.

Keep in touch and converse with them regularly without stalking them. Conversations do not have to be all about business, you may have connected because of a common personal interest. When you reconnect with them it can be just to see how they are. Otherwise, if your conversations are all about business it can sometimes put people off.

Remember this is about building relationships and not about stalking them!

**Action:**

1. Imagine you are making a request from one of the people you have only got to know very briefly but you want to conduct some research with them for your marketing purposes as they fall into your niche market. You want to ensure they don't feel like you are trying to sell to them. Capture now how would you approach them and what you would you say.
2. Imagine now that you're just taking some time to join an online forum like LinkedIn and you notice a contact you met at a networking meeting at least a year ago. Note how you will reconnect with them.
3. Prepare a message which you'd like to send via a private message system in LinkedIn with someone you met at a networking meeting yesterday.

## Creating Traffic Back to Your Website

Of course, networking online is not an activity you are doing just so you can get traffic to your website, it is about making quality connections and building connections to support your business community.

However, as you are online, it is important to guide people to your site if they want to know more as a potential client or strategic partner, or if they want to make a referral for you. Whether you are having a private discussion, a group discussion, or taking part in an online forum discussion, ensure that your website link is visible in your signature and profile.



One way to keep people on your website is by getting them to give you their name and email address in exchange for a free e-book or download based on something that would provide them with useful information to make their business life less overwhelming.

Therefore, use the title of this e-book in your online networking profile signature using a call to action for example: “If you want to know how to work smarter and increase your income opportunities, download my free e-book!” and this will link them to your website to access the information.

You can also use, where appropriate of course, people’s comments on your latest blog post and start a discussion. This will provide them with a link to that blog post and invite their comments. It’s amazing how people love discussions like that and to give their point of view.

You can even use the latest blog post title in your online profile for example “Get involved in our discussion on whether it’s better to network online or in person!” and this could lead them to your blog post which is a discussion on this topic or perhaps an invite to get involved in the discussion online. Whichever way you use it, it is a great way of linking traffic back to your site.

Think of appropriate call to actions and encourage people to do that action.

## **Be Consistent**

If you are doing it on a consistent basis, never stop. You must create a timetable that allows you to do that every week, or maybe once a month, and you are writing enough that you are ready for that whole month.

When someone in your niche or who you are targeting thinks that they are overwhelmed then they think of you! This is because you have been consistent. You are the person, that they are used to seeing deliver week in and week out.

They will come to you because of that and because you have been building up that level of understanding in people’s minds, of not only what you can help with by showing that you have got this great knowledge, you are bringing in some key people as well. Also the fact that you do specifically work with people who are of their sector or industry. That’s when they will come to you.

That could be over a period of three months (maybe years) before it happens.

So, if you do have a marketing list (newsletter list) and someone has signed up to receive emails from you – if you tell them you will email monthly – email monthly. If you tell them it’s weekly, do it weekly!

**Be consistent.**

## Summary

- Whatever you are doing online, ensure it never replaces what you do in person. Both need to work hand in hand as they complement one another.
- Never use your online presence to see what you can gain instead of reciprocating and supporting your business community.
- Whenever you start a discussion ensure that it is about something that will inevitably give useful tips and never about promoting your services.
- Online networking should be a regular activity not something you do when you find time. You must create a timetable and, even if it is just for five minutes at a time, incorporate it into your daily routine. By making the effort you will get noticed!

**Finally! This is the last of the 10 modules!!! That went quickly, didn't it?!**

But in the meantime, I want to know how you have got on...

- What has this e-course changed for you?
- What were you doing before that you will discontinue or continue?
- What has the information given you that will alter your confidence?
- What impact has it given you with what you are saying and presenting?
- How are you doing online networking differently now?

Let me know what has changed for you and any feedback would be great.

Networking is a critical factor for your VA business – if you realise going through this that there are other things you perhaps ought to put into place for your VA business – why not book a discovery call with me via <https://www.vact.co.uk/book-a-call/> or check out the various training courses VACT offers via: <https://www.vact.co.uk/training/>

Connect with me via:

- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/VirtualAssistantCoachingandTraining/>
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- Instagram: [https://www.instagram.com/va\\_mentor/](https://www.instagram.com/va_mentor/)

Finally, all it leaves me to say is:

**Be awesome – enjoy your networking.**

**Amanda**