

## In Social Media, We are the Pioneers of Our Time

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### Introduction

When it comes to social networking, we are all pioneers. It's true. And we've only touched the tip of this iceberg. This is why it is important to keep in mind that we are all in this together; that we are connected and we are all of equal value.

### The shift begins when school ends

Something interesting happens to all of us when we first enter the work force. Until we begin that first step in our career path, our networks are constantly growing and expanding. We continually meet new people with each new class, each school and at each new social gathering. But this trend begins to diminish quickly after we enter the work force and start to age. Many people simply do not invest the time to keep in touch with old classmates, neighborhood friends and distant relatives. They begin to lose contact. This is critical. That lack of contact is no longer healthy given the Web 2.0 world we all live, work and play in.

Some of us go to work for smaller companies or in occupations that do not allow us to interact with large numbers of people. Starting families means many live a more insular life-that's only natural. So, for a variety of reasons, in this socially networked age, many of our networks rely mainly upon prior college and high school friends-at first. It's the natural evolution that has occurred over the 23 years since the dawn of the Internet.

We all have networks. We had them long before the Internet was created, and we have the opportunity to make the most of them now-as a result of the Internet.

Every time we ask a friend for a piece of advice or share a story about our day, we are networking. Once you realize this, then networking comes much more naturally. With the explosive and constant growth of the Internet, we now have an unprecedented opportunity to stay in better touch with all our networks and contacts. In so doing, we are creating a new "virtual" network.

The Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram et al phenomenon is built upon new technology-a technology in which younger generations are creating vast virtual networks based on their interests-technology, gaming, music, art, etc. As with any social network most people started out creating a simple, basic profile on a social network. It didn't matter if it was LinkedIn, MySpace, Facebook, Flickr or Google+ that got us started. Everyone moving forward and continuing to evolve has eventually added at least a few photos, possibly a video, a blog, or even their favorite music-the constant is that these things are more personal...more true to our personalities.

### The importance of networks

We are sharing our likes and dislikes with a network of old friends (and new) in a manner never before tested. Our networks have now grown to include a new "virtual" circle of contacts creating a new kind of community. It sounds so simple but many people are missing the big picture. We, as a society, are interacting in ways that were never before possible in the physical world alone. We are engaging in real-time

discussions, sharing ideas and concepts with people in other countries and cultures, and our social groups have become much looser and far more geographically dispersed. Where will we take this?

The Internet has given us the opportunity to interact and connect with anyone who shares a similar interest regardless of where they live. This is huge, but it's just the tip of the iceberg.

For many, social networking quickly became a kind of security blanket. There is great comfort in connectedness. You never know when you're going to need it and you can never have enough of it (in my humble opinion). The more diverse your network, the greater the likelihood that someone will give you whatever information you need in any particular situation. Although your local circle of friends and family is still invaluable, it will always be limited in size and scope-unlike your Internet social network.

### Networking teaches us lessons

Understanding the value of virtual networking helps everyone see social media in a new light, so we can seek and find the social networking options that are our ideal forms of communication. For me, it's Facebook and LinkedIn. They work for me-one for personal contact and moral support, and the other for professional visibility, personal branding and business development. Whether we realize it or not, we have all embarked on this journey together. The very fact that you read this article means you're ahead of the curve in the new Web 2.0 world.

As always, participation is a choice. We can each be the pioneer we are and get on this social media bandwagon. We can choose to enjoy learning new things about the uses of social media and its myriad variations in order to continue to make educated decisions about our participation or we can sit back and let the parade pass us by.

I am a pioneer. Are you?

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