

## Four Ways Social Networking Can Build Business

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published on BNET.com 9/05/2008

Social networking may sound fluffy, but it can translate into real benefits for you and your company. William Baker, a professor of marketing at San Diego State University, surveyed 1,600 executives and found that firms that rely heavily on external social networks scored 24 percent higher on a measure of radical innovation than companies that don't. Online networks can help you hire the right people, market your product — or even find a manufacturer. Here are four professionals who used social networks to change the game.

### Finding Unexpected Collaborators

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**Tools:**

within3.com, a social network for scientific practitioners

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**Tactic:**

Saverio Gentile, a visiting fellow in the neurobiology laboratory at the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, had been using [within3.com](http://within3.com), a social network for doctors, to discuss medical journal articles. While mulling over a paper on nicotinic receptors, he connected with two researchers he'd never worked with before — though they were all in the same building. "Without the social network, even though we were a few meters apart, we would have never known we were all working on this," Gentile says. Working together, Gentile and his newfound colleagues, Elaine Gay and Jerrel Yakel, discovered a possible mechanism that can explain why nicotine receptors work the wrong way when associated with congenital myasthenia gravis, a hereditary disease that causes severe muscle fatigue. Since gathering further data on the breakthrough, the group has been selected to deliver a paper on the subject at a Society for Neuroscience convention in November.

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### Building a Global Business From Scratch

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**Tools:**

LinkedIn, Facebook, Flickr

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**Tactic:**

When Nick Kellet got in touch with a former co-worker through LinkedIn, he was interested to hear that she was teaching Chinese to the inventors of the board game Cranium to help them work with their factory in China. Kellet had recently left his job to publish a board game of his own, called GiftTRAP. His friend arranged an introduction to the factory owners in Shanghai, and soon Kellet

had a manufacturer for his game. Next he turned to photo-sharing site [Flickr](#) and found images from more than 500 different photographers that he could [legally use](#) for his game. Once GifTRAP had been produced, Kellet used social networks to find buyers at Wal-Mart and Toys “R” Us. “It’s not easy to get into those places,” he says. “You get stonewalled at reception.” Then he plugged into [BoardGameGeek](#) to connect with influential players in the tabletop-gaming community and get his product into the hands of reviewers. The long hours online paid off. *Games Magazine* declared GifTRAP the best party game of 2008; it has been translated into eight languages and is now in its third print run. Kellet isn’t done with social networking, either — he’s just developed a Facebook application that lets people play his game online.

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## Finding Talent in the Trenches

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**Tools:**

Blogs, Twitter

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**Tactic:**

LaunchSquad, a San Francisco PR firm working with freshly minted startups, has used social media to find potential job candidates who are skilled social networkers. “If we were going to attract the candidates with the skill sets we wanted, they had to be active within social media before they even came on,” says partner and co-founder Jason Throckmorton. “We began looking for people who were commenting on our client companies or things related to public relations.” Combing through [Twitter](#), they found then-University of Oregon senior Megan Soto, who had tweeted about the virtual community Vivaty, a LaunchSquad client. A quick Google search turned up [Soto’s blog](#), and the folks at LaunchSquad liked what they saw. The firm contacted Soto, interviewed her, and ultimately offered her a position, which Soto happily accepted. “She never would have found us unless we found her,” Throckmorton says.

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## Viral Marketing on the Cheap

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**Tools:**

Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter

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**Tactic:**

When Jennifer Wakefield of the Metro Orlando Economic Development Commission began social networking, she knew that film and media would be her target. “We have green nearly 365 days out of the year here in Orlando,” she says, which makes the city ideal for film shoots. She created profiles for metro Orlando on both [MySpace](#) and [Facebook](#), sites popular with film and entertainment professionals. Meanwhile, the commission’s Suzy Spang Allen, VP of film and digital media development, uses [Twitter](#) to connect with others at industry events like South by Southwest,

Sundance, and the Tribeca Film Festival. Wakefield reports that more eyes are already on Orlando: The number of producers scouting the Florida metropolis is up by 70 percent over last year.

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