The Savvy Gal's Guide to Online Networking (or What Would Jane Austen Do?) provides tips, tactics and etiquette advice for businesswomen who want to build professional relationships through email, online networks, blogs, and message boards.

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By Diane K. Danielson with Lindsey Pollak

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Introduction: Online Networking – What Would Jane Austen Do?

It is a truth universally acknowledged that a woman in search of a fabulous career must be in want of networking opportunities.

Or so Jane Austen would say if she were writing—or, more likely, blogging—today.

In some ways, modern networking is no different than what took place in Jane Austen's novels: it's important to know many different people, attend a myriad of social events, and, above all else, have proper manners at all times.

Yet, today, thanks to the Internet, we now have an entirely new world open to us: online networking, where you can connect with others via a few keystrokes and a click of a mouse. Whether you're looking for clients, funding for your company, a new job, or even a date (you're just as likely to find your Mr. Darcy online as at a formal ball), you can meet or research an infinite number of people through the web. And professional women are discovering that online networking not only opens doors to new business relationships, but it also helps us manage the relationships we already have in an efficient manner that fits our "always on the go" lifestyles.

Just how "always on the go" are women today? And how do women use technology to network? That's something we needed to find out before we started writing a guide for online networking. This is why, in 2006, we surveyed over 1,000 businesswomen from three generations (Generation Y, Generation X, and Baby Boomers)[1] through the *DowntownWomensClub.com 2006 Online Networking Survey: "High Tech or Not High Tech, That is Our Question."* Throughout this book, we'll be using interesting statistics from the survey to illustrate

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[1] Generation Y (born 1977-1993); Generation X (born 1965-1976); and Baby Boomer (born 1946-1964).

points. Below is the first example, which shows the top six reasons businesswomen network online.

Top six reasons businesswomen network online -
All generations combined (multiple answers allowed)

It's more time efficient	71%
I can multitask	49%
I can do it all hours from all time zones	47%
I can network with more people at once	35%
I don't have to travel	29%
I'm more gutsy online	29%

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%
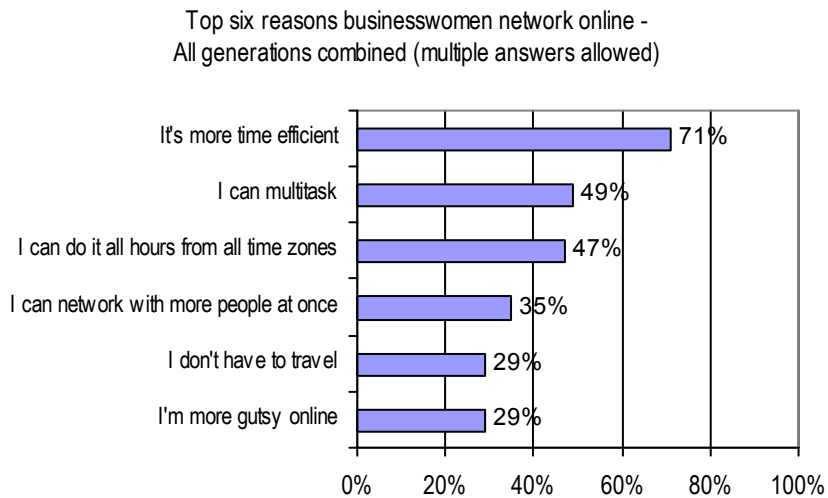
Excerpted from the DowntownWomensClub.com 2006 Online Networking Survey.

As demonstrated by the graph, time management is by far the biggest reason women network online. Yet, even when presented with the timesaving advantages, some people are still uncomfortable and reluctant to participate in the online world. Perhaps the reason is that no one wants to feel like Elizabeth Bennet, fresh in from the country, plopped down and inappropriately dressed at a high-brow event where we're told to mix, mingle, and mind our manners; yet we're not even clear which manners apply.

For online networking-phobes, the Internet can seem too huge, sprawling, anonymous, and, well, *technical*. But our hope is to make it more manageable for the networking neophyte, as well as a realm of opportunity for the experienced networker. So, before we get started, let's agree on a few basic, non-scary facts about how we approach the topic of online networking:

1. **Online networking is not—in no way, nada, not in a million years—a substitute for in-person, eyeball-to-eyeball relationship building.** Online networking complements in-person networking and is most effective when done in combination with live networking. This is why we advocate a "clicks and mix" strategy. In today's increasingly wired society, you can—and should—combine both. For those of you who can't get enough of online networking, don't forget that you need to balance your web interactions with live connections to reap the best results. And, all the face-to-face advocates should consider online networking a tool to help manage and maintain contacts between meetings.

2. **Online networking does not mean that you will turn into a teenager who is attached to a computer 24/7, with 50 instant messaging screens open at once and people gossiping about you on MySpace.com.** In this book, you'll learn how to network online at your own pace, within your own comfort level, and in a professional manner (with other grownups!).

   Now that we know what online networking *isn't,* let's talk about what it is.

   In this book, we define online networking as any form of relationship building that is enabled by technology. This includes participating in any or all of the following activities that will be explained in much greater detail in the chapters to come:[2]

- Making email introductions—including introducing yourself to a new contact by email and acting as a third party to introduce others by email for networking purposes.
- Using search engines, such as Google, to find information about potential networking connections.

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[2] One technology we've decided not to cover is instant or text messaging. Both generally occur after a networking relationship has been established (e.g., when running late to that face-to-face networking meeting, we've found texting is a lifesaver).

- Refining your own online presence—first, making sure that you have one, and second, making sure that it represents the professional image you'd like to portray to the world.
- Posting a profile and interacting with other members on a professional networking site, such as DWC Faces or LinkedIn.
- Writing, reading, or responding to e-newsletters.
- Writing, reading, or commenting on blogs and message boards.

You probably do a lot of these things already, but may not think of them as networking. Or, some of this might be new to you, and that's fine too. Our goal in writing this book is to serve as a guide for savvy businesswomen ready to add online networking to their always growing skill sets. We hope to explain it all to you in just enough detail so that your eyes don't glaze over, but still provide enough explanation so that you can achieve your own networking goals in the most efficient, effective, and enjoyable way possible.

Etiquette & Netiquette

Before we move on to the fun stuff, we have a few tidbits of networking etiquette that cross all forms of online and in-person networking and that you should keep in mind, no matter where, when, or how you are networking.

- **Give first, ask later**. Nothing is more irksome than meeting or receiving messages from people who talk nonstop about what *they* need and how we can help them. In any networking interaction, it's always best to develop a genuine personal connection first, and then broach the subject of how you and your new contact might help each other. A good rule of thumb: listen more than you talk (or read more than you write).

- **Keep it upbeat and interesting.** Like attracts like, so in the world of networking positive energy attracts positive energy. This is why we encourage people to create unique networking strategies (both

online and offline) around activities and people they genuinely enjoy.

- **Deliver what you promise.** Be realistic about what you can offer anyone with whom you network. Do not try to make friends by promising follow-up you may not be able to deliver (such as guaranteeing a meeting with your boss or client). Overpromising and underdelivering is a quick way to lose friends and alienate new contacts.

- **Manage your expectations.** It's unlikely that any one single networking encounter will result in obtaining a new job or new customer. It's best to approach each connection with a specific, more tangible goal in mind, such as securing a second meeting or gaining some valuable insight or information. Consider the networking meeting/email/chat/event a success if you are able to achieve one specific goal.

- **Mind your manners.** You can recover from any faux pas as long as you do it elegantly and with proper etiquette (and a good sense of humor helps too). But, better yet, learn the appropriate etiquette before you act and you'll avoid pulling any faux pas in the first place.

In general, all networking rules boil down to one thing: ***making the other person comfortable.*** When in doubt, put yourself in the other person's hopefully comfortable pumps, loafers, or Birkenstocks, as the case may be. What would you think of your email, newsletter, or blog post if you were in your recipient's shoes? When you're online networking, you can't do wrong when you mentally let your fingers walk over your contact's keyboard!

With many of the same protocols applying to both in-person and online networking, we hope that even the most reluctant networker will find the time and the motivation to get out and meet people, whether it's "clicking" online or "mixing" it up in person.

For those of you who already consider yourselves to be strong networkers, then online networking is even more important to master. Perhaps you have experienced that "tapped out" feeling—that the same people show up at the same events, and you haven't been expanding your list of client prospects or potential new employers? Well, you can *never* feel that way online, where there are infinite ways to meet new people who share your interests. Even if you've found yourself with too many contacts and so little time, technology can help maintain contact in a time-efficient manner.

As we hope to demonstrate in this book, the possibilities open to you for networking online are virtually limitless. And that is something that should make the Jane Austen in all of us more than a little curious and reluctant to be left out, or even worse, left behind.

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