

Networking

The term "networking" makes people very nervous (including me!), but if you view networking as relationship building, you might be more confident to pursue these relationships with people. Networking "everywhere" simply means developing relationships with the people you interact with each day. When you step into the bank to deposit a check, get to know the person behind the counter. When you go to the dentist to get your teeth cleaned, talk to the hygienist about their family. These simple acts of kindness help us become more connected to those around us, and help us develop positive relationships. You never know when you might talk to the cashier at the grocery store and find out that their cousin's husband's best friend works at the exact company you want to work for. If you have already developed an acquaintance with the cashier, they might be willing to give your name to the "best friend" who works at the company!

In addition to being kind to those around you, there are organizations and websites devoted to networking and gaining industry knowledge in your field.

1. **Professional Associations or Industry Groups** - Professional associations are comprised of members from a similar profession, industry, or interest group. These organizations typically have state, regional, and national chapters for members to be involved with. Some of the benefits of being a member of one of these professional associations include regional/state/national conferences and meetings; access to webinars, professional journals, networking events; and opportunities to serve on regional/state/national boards and committees. Most associations charge a membership fee which ranges from a few dollars to hundreds of dollars, but many employers will pay for membership fees and conference attendance. These associations, in my opinion, are the most effective way to network with professionals in your field, inquire about job opportunities, and participate in professional development activities.
2. **Alumni Associations** - Alumni Associations are comprised of graduates and/or past students at a particular school, college, or university. Many alumni associations host alumni events, where you can meet other graduates of your institution. At Western Illinois University, we have a very active alumni association!! Check out their website at [WIU Alumni Association](#) . The WIU Alumni Association hosts "Alumni & Friends" events throughout the country, and also hosts events at Homecoming each year. Most of these events have a cost to attend, but it depends on the event. The socials offered at local pubs

and restaurants typically are \$10-20, but the professional football games and art events can be up to \$100 - \$200. Typically, these prices include a meal, tickets at a reduced group rate, and coupons for drinks. The benefit of attending these events (other than having a really FUN time) involves networking with new people who share the common experience of graduating from WIU. At these events, you might meet someone who is hiring or who knows someone at the company you are interested in working at!

3. **Online Websites** - There are many online websites that are designed for networking purposes. [LinkedIn](#) is one example of an online website where you can "connect" with people you already know, add people you met at professional conferences or alumni events, join groups related to your professional industry, search for new networking connections, view job postings, and apply for jobs!

Another website you could consider is [Meet Up](#), which lists groups of people "meeting up" for a specific purpose. There are volunteer groups, Harry Potter fan groups, Mommy and Me groups, and groups related to specific hobbies and interests. You can also check out Volunteer Match, which lists opportunities for you to volunteer in your region or around the world. While these websites are not specifically designed for professional networking, you will meet new people and build relationships with others. Remember that Networking is Relationship Building!