

AUSTRALIAN
CAREER INFORMATION SERIES

START
smart

networking in Australia

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Networking naturally

Many people find networking difficult, especially in the unfamiliar territory of a whole new country. You may even dread the thought of it in any circumstances, thinking: “I simply don’t have it in me.” But you don’t have to be extroverted or a ‘people person’ to be an effective networker. Sincerity, combined with a little effort, is enough.

Having a patient, caring attitude often gives introverted or reserved people an advantage over more chatty networkers because introverts are usually good listeners who absorb and reflect on what they hear. The ability to remember what others say, and notice what they value, is critical to fostering good relationships.

Many introverted people panic and become immobilised at the prospect of calling strangers in particular. However, by focusing on your industry or field, or on a special career interest you are passionate about, you can overcome this terror.

What’s your passion? What field, industry, product development, service or cause excites you? What do you enjoy researching and studying? What current events or documentary subjects capture your attention? Hook into these interests and you will be able to talk with conviction and insight, which can reduce your networking jitters.

Volunteering

Seeking or accepting volunteer work with professional, community and other groups is a good way for anyone to network, but it’s an especially good option for less outgoing people. It helps to develop genuine relationships, and you are

likely to get noticed by other caring people. Volunteer jobs that allow you to display your skills are particularly valuable.

Body language

Along with adopting a positive attitude to networking, you need to use positive body language. It's not as tricky as it might seem if you remember a few basic points:

- Make good eye contact with people when you meet and talk to them.
- Don't slouch when standing, or slump when seated. Poor posture conveys laziness and bad manners.
- Similarly, be alert with people to convey respect and enthusiasm.
- Shake hands firmly to indicate confidence.
- Smile. Don't overdo it, but no-one finds frowning attractive.
- Keep your hair well groomed and maintain personal hygiene.

Adjust other behaviour as you see fit, but don't do anything that seems artificial or contrived.

Overcoming reserve

Reserved professionals can become more effective networkers by heeding these points:

1. Recognise and try to deal with the aspects of networking that bother you most. For example, if you are scared of meeting people, practice talking about your interests, training and abilities with trusted friends. If you are worried about becoming tongue-tied, role-play your meetings until you feel more confident.

2. Create a structured networking plan and stick to it. Set goals and be disciplined about achieving them. Try to attend at least three events a week, and look at attending events at different times of the day to tap into different audiences. Go to breakfast seminars, lunches and one-day or evening seminars. You can adapt the sample call plan on Page 39 to create a personalised networking plan.
3. Plan some ice-breakers to use with new contacts. Develop a natural-sounding script that includes open-ended questions such as “What did you think of the event?” or “So what brought you along here this evening?” or “Have you been to other events run by this group?” You can also ask for information without specifically asking for help or appearing to be needy—for example, asking for industry information or where to acquire newsletters.
4. Take time out to replenish and centre yourself. Plan your schedule so you have periods of solitude and relaxation that allow you to recharge. For instance, don’t schedule a full day’s phone calls if you plan to network at an evening event.
5. While you don’t have to fundamentally change yourself, learning and practising more extroverted skills and behaviours will make you a more effective job hunter. You may well start developing an acquired taste for networking—and when you start experiencing the benefits, your appetite is likely to increase.

Sustaining relationships

- Take every reasonable opportunity to socialise professionally.
- Seek out ways you can help others with their endeavours.
- Stay in touch via emails and instant messaging (but don't overdo it).
- If you hear of an event or see an article that may interest a contact, tell them about it. It's a natural excuse to catch up.
- If you don't have a natural excuse, suggest buying potentially useful people a coffee so you can catch up or 'swap notes.' Make sure you ask how they are going, and take an interest in and remember what they tell you.
- Keep good relationships going even after you have secured a position.

Industry and professional associations

Regardless of the industry or sector you are in, Australia has an organisation to represent you and your profession. You can research through the internet and email them so you feel confident about becoming a member and getting involved when you arrive in Australia.

The benefits of joining such associations include professional credibility and kudos, and access to best-practice standards, legal and political representation, and educational opportunities. They also present you with targeted networking opportunities through engaging with other members and attending seminars, workshops and conferences.

For your purposes, the cocktail evenings and other informal get-togethers after functions can be most valuable. You can mingle with members and talk to company leaders about their businesses. Always remember that you are out to build your network and find out what is going on in your sector rather than directly promote yourself. You will be in a group of professionals who share your industry and passion, so there will be plenty in common to discuss.

Some associations also directly assist job seekers by advertising positions in their publications and providing company listings and contact details.

Membership fees generally range from \$100-\$400, and occasionally more, but they are tax deductible at the end of each tax year (June 30).

Joining a professional association also helps you:

- Get up to speed with your industry in Australia. Professional associations help you to learn about trends in your area of interest through conferences, workshops, newsletters, journals, magazines and website material. They often host web-based discussion groups and conduct online member surveys to obtain the latest statistics and other information.
- Find out about jobs before they are advertised through job listings, informal group meetings, blogs, web chats, etc. Some publications, and other association material with job listings and info on who is hiring, are for members only. Some associations work so closely with organisations, they can put you directly in contact with employers.
- Further your education in your field from an Australian perspective. Attending conferences, expos, workshops, and professional courses and seminars all contribute

to your continuing education and professional development. You can build your network and meet key players in your field of interest while learning about product and service developments, developing issues and trends, etc.

- Show you are assimilating in Australia and are committed to staying. Employers are concerned about how much prospective employees know about the way things work in Australia in both technical and cultural terms. Active membership in a peak professional body shows that you know what's required and are making the effort.

Alternative associations

As a possible alternative to, or in addition to, a professional association, consider joining social and community-based associations such as Rotary, Toastmasters, a Lions Club, fishing and sporting clubs, churches, environmental bodies, cultural groups, political parties... whatever you are interested in. While developing your personal familiarity with and involvement in the community, you can take the opportunity to build your network and get referrals.

Association listings

These websites list major Australian professional and trade associations.

- University of New South Wales:
<http://www.careers.unsw.edu.au/student/Usefullinks/profAssoc.aspx>
- Search for 'professional services' at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology site at:
<http://www.rmit.edu.au/>

- Yahoo.com lists at:

http://au.dir.yahoo.com/Business_and_Economy/Organisations/Trade_Associations

http://au.dir.yahoo.com/Business_and_Economy/Organisations/Professional/

Association networking master plan

- 1. Research** using the internet to get a feel for the associations available, their values and benefits.
- 2.** If you feel it necessary, ask if you can attend an event at no charge before you commit. When you feel confident about an association's suitability to your purposes, **join** it.
- 3. Attend** a few events to meet fellow members and establish rapport.
- 4.** Add new contacts to your list, then nurture and **build** the relationships.

Industries and sectors

Targeting an industry sector is one route to finding a specific job. You may even be able to create a job within a company based on what you have to offer.

To know where to network and be able to converse with professional colleagues, you need a broad understanding of your sector and the opportunities and challenges it presents—now and in the future. For example, Australia's workforce demographic is ageing overall, with big implications for the

health and financial services sectors. These sectors have worsening skill shortages, resulting in high employment demand. You can predict that in five or 10 years, demand for expertise in these areas will be strong, which may affect the type of work you are interested in now.

To understand an industry sector, refer to a variety of information sources:

- Online—Google your sector for background information in reports and the like.
- Trade associations—Just as there are professional associations for individuals, there are also trade and industry bodies with a wealth of information online and by request.
- Government sites—Check out the official government sites dedicated to your field. For example, if you are in the health sector, look at federal and state health department sites. If you are in engineering or resources, look for departments of primary industry.
- Media—Look for coverage of your industry in major newspapers, trade magazines and radio reports (mainly the non-commercial stations) to learn about current issues and major players.
- Small and medium-size businesses—Australia has about 1.2 million businesses² in this sector (SMB). They are vital to the economy and shouldn't be overlooked. Refer to company listings in your industry.

Research like this not only points your job search in the right direction. It also gives you things to talk about when networking. Knowing what's going on, despite the fact that you are new to Australia, clearly demonstrates interest, enthusiasm, initiative and the capability to think strategically.

2 Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade statistic