

Professional Networking Today: Think On and Offline



Building a professional network is important. We use our professional network for information, support, and sometimes assistance. It takes a long time to build a network and forever to maintain relationships.

But building a professional network today isn't the same as it was a decade ago. Because now we have to think about building and maintaining two networks: 1) an online network and 2) an offline one. That was one of my big takeaways from William Arruda's book "[Digital You: Real Personal Branding in the Virtual Age](#)".

I know some people might see the term "personal branding" in the book title and say to themselves "Oh, the concept of personal branding is dead. Good riddance." Well, Arruda addresses that subject at the very beginning of his book. One of the statistics that he quotes talks about employees having an average of 10 times more social connections than a brand and brand messages reaching 561 percent farther when shared by employees. Your employees know they have this ability and they will work to develop a digital brand. It gives them control over the way they work.

Back to networking. While the chapter in "Digital You" about assessing your current on- and offline networks isn't very long, it really got me thinking. I'm not sure we can [develop an online professional network](#) the same way that we develop our offline one. Here are a few things to consider:

We live in a very digital world. When we meet someone for the first time, what do we do? That's right. We Google them to make sure they're legit. We try to find out about their background. And we check out their LinkedIn profile. (I'm not talking about interviewing candidates here. That's a different story.) My point is the [internet has changed the way we meet people](#). So, we need to have an online brand as well as our personal presence.

We need to have both an online and offline network. While "Digital You" obviously is focused on the online network, it doesn't

dismiss the need for an offline one. The purpose of having a personal brand isn't to choose between the two. It's to develop and maintain both the online and offline networks well. This is where I would toss out some tough love. Networking is hard. Think about all the times we say to ourselves that we can network "later". Having a successful personal brand means making time for more networking.

Our online network isn't more important than our offline one. And vice versa. Both our online and offline networks bring different value. I can see accessibility being a benefit of an online network. It's easier to access people using technology. An online network could also allow us to build a global network. On the other hand, we get the benefit of non-verbal communication with our offline network. We can also benefit from the change of scenery we might interact with our offline network – conferences, coffee shops, etc.

Our online network is more than a friend, follower, or connection count. Don't get me wrong. Friends, followers, and connections are important, but chances are you're not regularly engaging with all of them. Maybe you're connected through a mutual online group. For starters, think of your online network as the group of people who will answer a DM, PM, or in-mail from you. They know who you are and will engage with you.

"Digital You" reminded me that as much as we use technology and social media, it's changing and evolving all the time. The way we used it five years ago isn't the way we use it today. And it won't be the [way we use it in the years ahead](#). That includes how we manage our personal brand and how we build our professional networks.

By : Sharlyn Lauby