

# Networking made easy

Raising your business profile doesn't have to be professional torture.  
Heather Townsend explains

Whether you network online or offline, the chances are that you will often have to leave your comfort zone. And by its very definition, leaving your comfort zone is going to feel uncomfortable. If you have to approach people you don't know, you will inevitably feel slightly anxious. Will they engage with me? How will I come across? What if they don't welcome my approach? Fear of failure often prevents us from taking action. But if you don't try, you won't know. And what is the worst thing that can happen? Remember that most people find networking intimidating and they will probably feel pleased that you have taken the time to strike up a conversation with them.

There are many different reasons why we need to network – to deepen relationships with colleagues and clients, raise our profile within our organisation, win new business, keep up to date with best practice in our field, and help our future career prospects. But although networking is important, it is also daunting. And if you're working long hours, with other commitments outside the office, it can be easy to tell yourself that you don't have time to network right now.

But one day you might regret your decision not to invest in growing and maintaining your network – if you find

yourself out of a job following a company restructuring or merger, for example, or if you miss out on a prized internal promotion. Then you might look back on the missed networking opportunities that you have in your current job and ask yourself why you didn't make more of them.

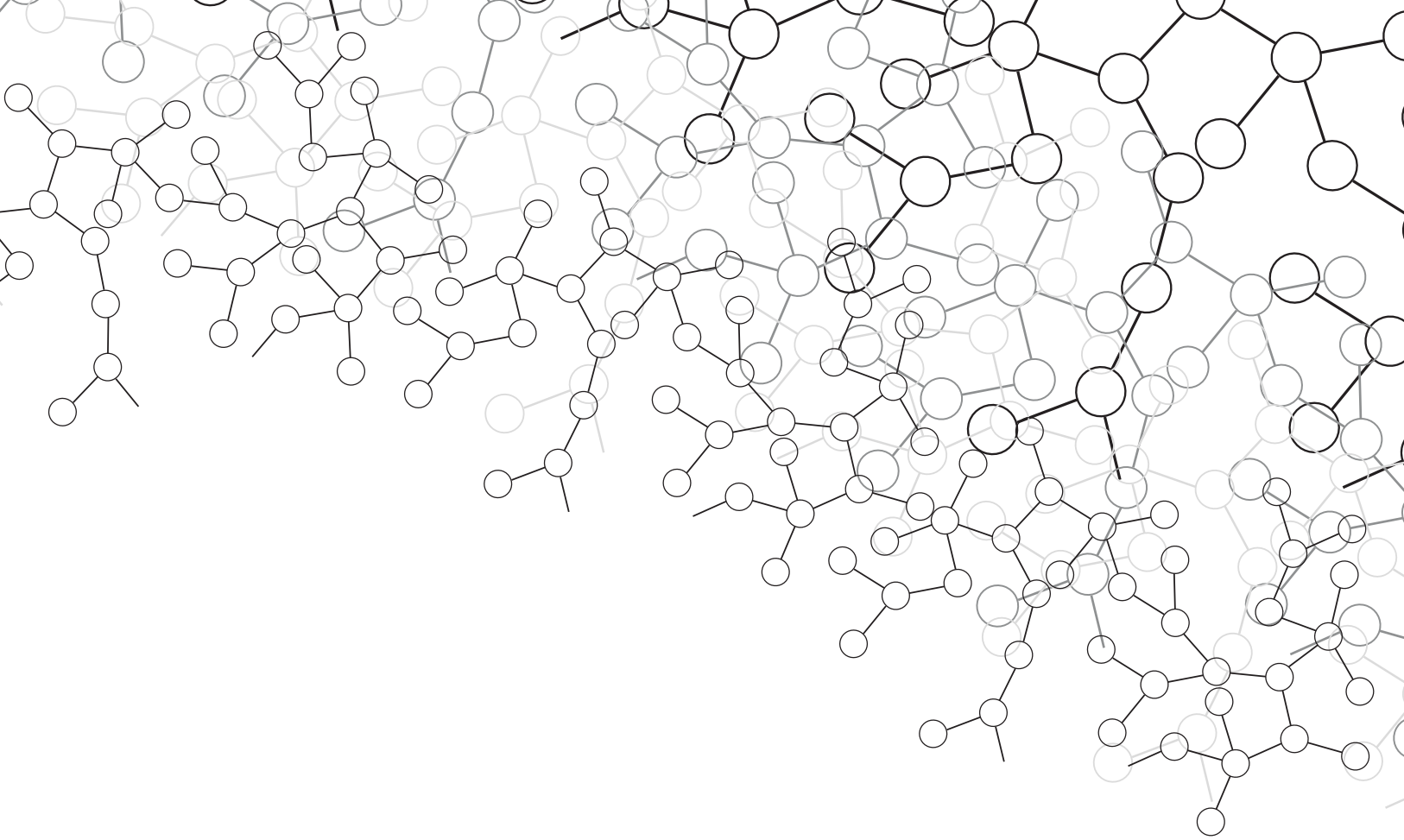
Most people assume that business networking means going to formal events where you have to drink warm white wine and eat dried-up egg sandwiches. It can be a form of professional torture, particularly if suppliers and consultants swarm around you in the belief that you have a large budget to spend on their services and products. Actually, effective business networking is the process where you find, build and maintain mutually beneficial relationships. Note that there is nothing in this definition about having to go out and work a room. Networking can be simple if you let it.

Start by developing a basic networking strategy. Identify why you are networking, the people you would most like to meet and how they can help you achieve your career goals. Then put a plan of action in place. If you want to raise your profile internally, don't ignore your organisation's formal and informal social events. While

a family fun day may be your idea of hell, it's a great way to meet senior people in your organisation when they are feeling relaxed. And remember that being seen to support company initiatives by influential people in your organisation or department is always a great profile-raiser.

If you want to make more of a name for yourself in the wider treasury profession, it's important to attend as many relevant conferences, briefings and seminars as you can. Not only are these a good opportunity to meet interesting people, who have similar professional interests to you, but you get to brush up on your professional knowledge at the same time. And if you're actually invited to speak at an event, well, what are you waiting for? You will find that people come and actively seek you out in the drinks session afterwards, which makes networking easy.

Think about how you can use the internet effectively in your networking efforts. Have a LinkedIn account and fill in your profile. Remember this is not your CV, but your professional shop window to the world. So update your LinkedIn status a couple of times a week with what you are up to. This is a great way of getting the word out to your network that you are still here and around. Your status updates could include a good article



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There are many different reasons why we need to network – to deepen relationships with colleagues and clients, raise our profile within our organisation, win new business, keep up to date with best practice in our field, and help our future



**Heather Townsend** is the author of the bestselling book, *The Financial Times Guide to Business Networking*. Her next book, *How to Make Partner and Still Have a Life*, is due to be published by Kogan Page in November 2012

## CONTACT STRATEGY

◆ Make use of the professional bodies that you belong to or engage with, such as the ACT. The ACT runs an annual conference that is very well attended, as well as a comprehensive range of other events in the UK, continental Europe, the Middle East and globally. These are an excellent opportunity for you to network with other treasurers and treasury advisers. And don't forget to follow up with interesting people that you meet afterwards. For more information on ACT events, see [www.treasurers.org/events](http://www.treasurers.org/events)

◆ To get the most networking value out of a conference, aim to miss a couple of sessions.

You are not at school now so no one will take a register. During those sessions, arrange to meet people you want to get to know better.

◆ If you go on an internal or external training course or session, aim to stay in touch with other people on the course. You never know when they may be able to help you out in the future, or vice versa.

◆ When you are on the phone to a contact, whether they are internal or external to your organisation, don't just talk business, take time to have a personal chat. Finding out more about someone can help to deepen a relationship.

◆ Do one small thing each day to keep

yourself visible to your internal and external company network. It may be dropping an email to someone you met at a conference, requesting a connection on LinkedIn or following them on Twitter.

◆ Instead of going to lunch with the same people every day, push yourself outside your comfort zone and aim to have one lunch a week with someone you don't know as well.

◆ Volunteer to get involved in cross-organisational or cross-department projects, initiatives, committees or working groups. It's a great profile-raiser, not just for you, but your department or team generally.