

Socialising (3): Social networking**Topic:** Socialising and social networking**Aims:**

- To introduce and discuss the importance of social networking and how it helps with face-to-face networking;
- To teach some tips, techniques and useful phrases for social networking;
- To provide practice of writing brief social networking messages (blog posts, comments, tweets, etc.).

Level: Intermediate (B2) and above**Introduction**

Why is it that when you go to a conference or business gathering, everyone else seems to know each other already? At least part of the answer to the puzzle seems to be social networking: getting to know business contacts online first, so that by the time you meet face to face for the first time, you already have plenty to talk about. For many people, social networking is seen as something to do instead of work. This lesson emphasises that social networking is real work. The lesson introduces useful language and techniques, building up to a large social networking simulation at the end.

1. Lead-in

Write the following questions on the board.

- a. What exactly is networking? What's the difference between networking and social networking?
- b. Which social networking sites / tools have you heard of? Which have you used? Which would you recommend?
- c. What is the relationship between social networking and face-to-face socialising?
- d. Do you see social networking as something you do for work or for pleasure?
- e. What can you do to get the most out of social networking for work?

Students discuss the questions in small groups. After a few minutes, open up the discussion to include the whole class.

Suggested answers

- a. Networking (in general) involves building a network of people who you are connected to in some way (e.g. old school friends, ex-colleagues, people you meet at conferences). The principle is that you can get to know new contacts because they already know some of your existing contacts. An important part of networking is maintaining relationships with people in your network, e.g. by sending them messages from time to time. Social networking is the same as traditional networking, but it involves using internet sites and tools to make the process much easier and more effective.
- b. The best known sites include Facebook, MySpace, Twitter and LinkedIn. However, there are thousands of such sites, and new ones are becoming popular all the time. The most important social networking tool seems to be blogs: writing them or commenting on other people's blogs. Because so many

blogs are connected to each other (e.g. when the writers comment on or recommend each other's posts), the blogging community is called the blogosphere.

- c. If you build strong relationships with people through social networking, it will be much easier to talk with them when you finally meet face to face.
- d. Most people see it as something they do for pleasure, or as a distraction from their real work. But anybody whose job involves networking and socialising would benefit from spending time building and maintaining a professional social network.
- e. Set aside some time every day to build and maintain your network. Make the effort to stay in touch with people and make sure you always reply to their messages.

2. Kim's blog

Students read the blog post to see which of the questions on the board it addresses and what it says about them. When you discuss the answers with the class, check any vocabulary problems (e.g. *to change sb's mind*, *to approach sb*, *to end up doing sth*, *in advance*, *spare*, *to transform sth*).

Suggested answers

Kim focuses mainly on question (c), but he also deals with questions (d) and (e). He refers to an answer to question (b) in his comment at the bottom.

3. Discussion

Focus students' attention on the third comment at the bottom of the blog. Discuss with the class how Kim should respond to the comment.

Suggested answer

See *Top ten tips to get started in social networking*, tip 8, and the sample answer in *Phrases for social networking*.

4. Top ten tips to get started in social networking.

Write the ten bold words and phrases from the text on the board (e.g. discussion groups, LinkedIn, etc.). Students work in pairs or groups of three to predict what advice will be given about each word or phrase in connection with social networking for work.

Cut up the text so that each numbered section is on a separate slip of paper, and stick the ten slips to the wall around the classroom. If you have a large class (i.e. more than about 12 students), you may need two copies of each slip.

Students then go around the room, choosing around five or six sections to read to check their predictions. After about five minutes, students go back to their groups to report back on what they read, using the key words from the board to help them remember. They should discuss whether their predictions were correct, what the text advised, and whether they agree with the advice. If nobody in a group read one of the texts, they can go back and read it now.

After a few minutes, open up the discussion to include the whole class. Discuss whether any students already follow the advice given, or whether they intend to.

You may need to check some vocabulary from the texts: *deathly quiet, lively, to get involved in sth, cheeky, to bore sb, an approach, spam, to re-tweet sth, amazed, brave, to respond, to integrate sth, an element, available, to make an effort, to irritate sb, to resist the temptation to do sth, to regret sth, to engage with sb, delighted.*

5. Phrases for social networking

Distribute the worksheet so that each student has a copy. Students then work in pairs to decide which type(s) of social networking each set of phrases or messages belongs to. After a few minutes, discuss the answers with the class.

Suggested answers

- The first box contains phrases from Twitter. RT stands for re-tweet, i.e. somebody sends your message to everyone in their own network. Note that mention and follow are normally verbs, but here are used as nouns. It would also be possible (but longer) to say 'thanks for mentioning my post' or 'thanks for following me'.
- The second box contains phrases which could come from any social networking site or blog. They are useful for introducing a link or reacting to somebody else's message / blog post.
- The third box contains phrases which could also come from any site, such as Facebook or Twitter.
- The fourth box is a message on a site such as LinkedIn, to accompany an invitation to connect.
- The fifth box could be an email chain, or a live text chat on a site like Facebook or Skype. Note that Olga manages to generate some potential business for her company even though she doesn't try to sell it or ask for help directly.
- The sixth box is a reply to the unpleasant comment on Kim's blog.
- The seventh box contains a set of useful phrases for commenting on blog posts. Note that the writer of the final comment disagrees with the author, but tries to be positive and constructive, not aggressive or negative.

6. Discussion

Focus students' attention on the sixth box. Discuss with the class the techniques that Kim uses to deal with the problem, and whether students agree with Kim's approach.

Suggested answer

Kim starts by acknowledging the other person's complaint, while avoiding the temptation to try to argue against it. Kim's attitude seems to be that differences of opinion are healthy and positive – we can learn from hearing other people's opinions, even if we don't agree with them. In the second paragraph, Kim answers Dominik's question, without being too defensive / apologetic or aggressive. Kim ends with an invitation, which he tries to make sound as genuine and open as possible (I'd love for you to ...; What do you think?), to avoid the danger that Dominik will think Kim is being ironic / sarcastic. Dominik will probably ignore the invitation, but if he does decide to write a post, it could be a great addition to Kim's blog. More importantly, Kim has shown all the other

readers of his blog (including people who read the blog years into the future) that Kim is pleasant and open to other people's opinions.

7. **Social networking game**

Print out the instructions so that students can read them in small groups. While students are reading the instructions, distribute the Blog post worksheets so that each student has a copy. You should also stick some copies of the Social Network worksheet on a wall.

When students have read the instructions, check they have understood by asking questions: How long should your initial blog post be? Where should you write it? What should it be about? What information do you need to include in your blog post? Where are the two places where you can write comments? What do you need to monitor? Point out that if they run out of comment boxes, they can write their comments on the back of the sheet of paper, or ask for more sheets of paper from you.

If you prefer, you could ask students to write their initial blog posts in pairs, with one student writing down their joint ideas. This will be easier and more communicative, but it will mean the advice and interaction are less personalised.

Allow five minutes for the initial writing and around ten minutes for students to read and comment on each other's blog posts. Encourage students to be brief and positive in their comments. Monitor carefully to help with any language questions that come up.

When they have finished, ask each student to report back on by summarising their initial blog post and the discussions that it generated. You should also discuss with the class the best advice from the blog posts and comments. At the end, collect the sheets of paper in order to correct language mistakes before the next lesson.

As a follow-up, encourage students to repeat the game in real life at home, by commenting on real blog posts and getting more involved in social networking in English.

