Networking and Personal Branding E-GUIDE
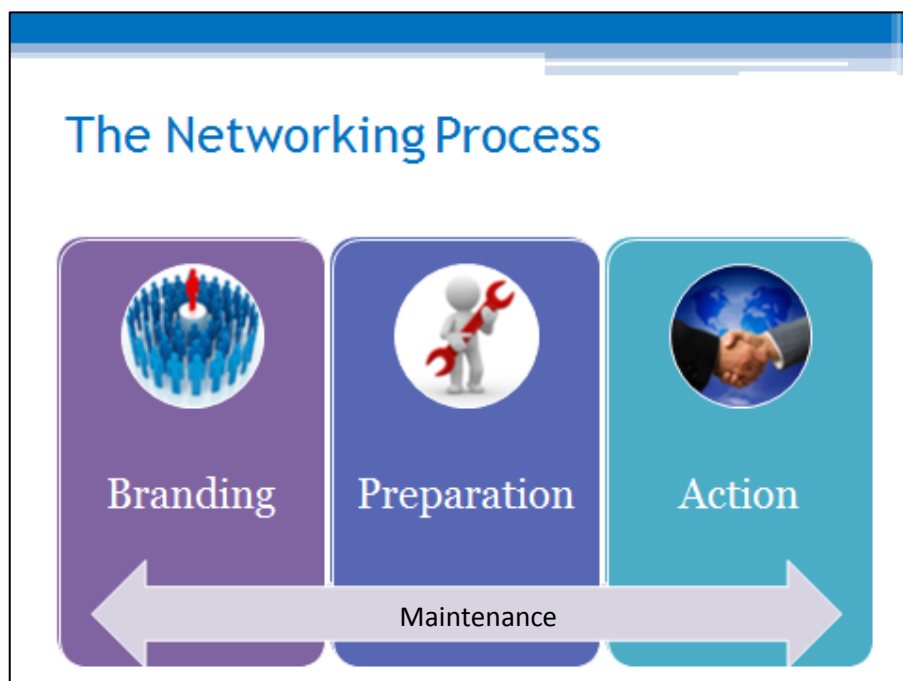
IN THIS SECTION:

NETWORKING

WHAT IS NETWORKING?

In a career development context, "networking" refers to the process by which professionals establish meaningful relationships with one another. Think of it as creating an invisible web of connections between you and other people with each strand of the web serving as a two-way conductor of information and assistance. This web is a living entity, it stays alive if you continue to feed it by making connections with others and maintaining those connections through continued interaction. If you make a connection, but stop interacting with it, that connection disappears and your web shrinks. The goal is to have a large, healthy, web of individuals to share information with and tap for assistance when necessary. The important piece of this to remember is that **networking is a two-way street**; you do not just approach networking connections when you need something, the relationships you create must be nurtured and maintained over time.

HOW TO NETWORK

Networking is a process that consists of personal branding, preparation, taking action, and maintenance. The process constantly cycles and recycles as you go through the career development process.
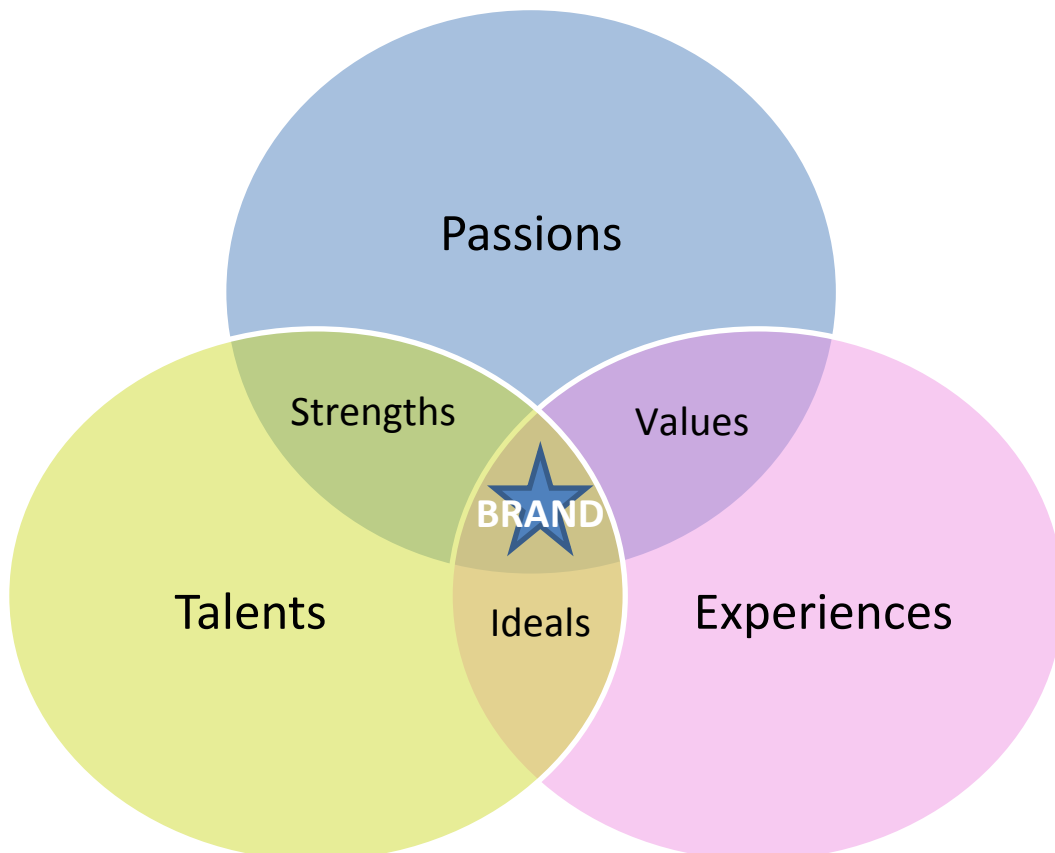
PERSONAL BRANDING

The first step of effective networking is creating a personal brand for yourself. When you think of the word "brand" what does it bring to mind for you? "Branding" is used in the world of marketing and sales to help companies effectively sell their products to target audiences. For example, think of a product you really like and the kinds of messages you see in commercials, social media, etc. from the company that sells that product. How does the company get across to you the quality of their product? What is special about that product that makes it different from other products? What kinds of words and feelings do you associate with that product?

A "Personal Brand" is exactly the same thing, only in this case it is how YOU are marketing YOURSELF to the professional world. When creating a personal brand, you need to consider the image you want to present to the professional world, the messages you want to send, and what makes you special and different from other candidates. Targeted selling returns higher sales, and in this case, we are targeting your ideal employers and selling your special skills, talents, and qualities. We want employers to see you as a commodity that they simply have to have as part of their team.

When creating your personal brand, ask yourself:

- What are my strengths and what am I already known for?
- What am I passionate about and what sets me apart from others?
- What would I like to accomplish in my life?
- How do I define success?
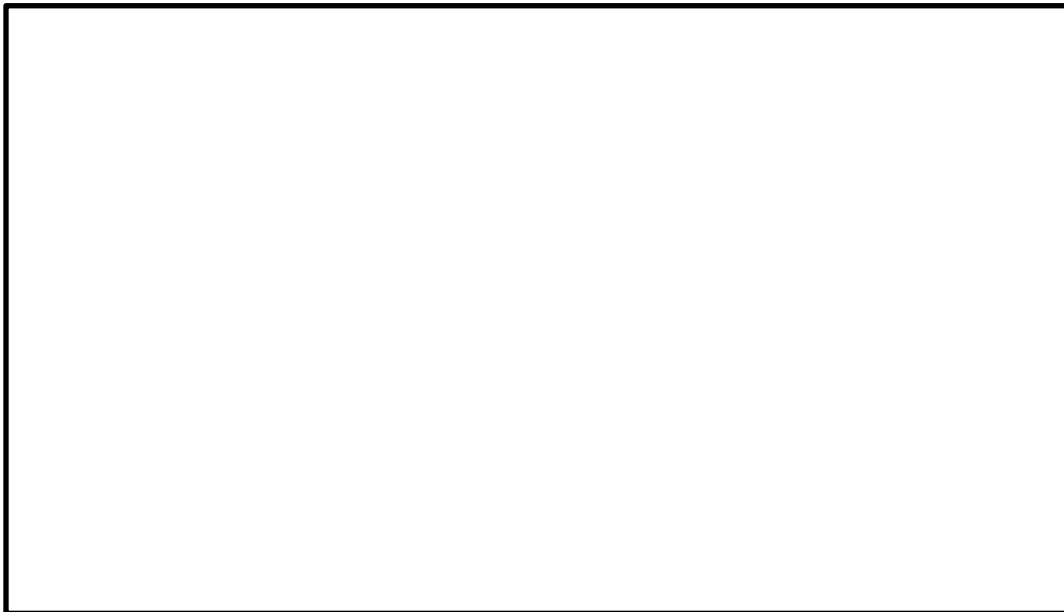- What do I want employers to remember about me?

Here are some exercises to get you thinking about your personal brand:

Some words that describe me are:

1.   2.   3.

4.   5.   6.

7.   8.   9.

If I had a slogan, it would be: _____

If I had a logo, it would look like this (Draw a symbol or picture)

Your brand is your personal philosophy toward work and professional life. Once you have an idea of what your brand is, incorporate it into how you speak to others professionally, write your resumes and cover letters, your personal pitch (detailed in a later section of this e-guide), your business card, social media etc. Your brand will continue to evolve and develop, but remember, always be consistent with your messaging so that employers remember who you are, what you stand for, and what value you bring to the professional world.

PREPARATION

Networking does often take a certain amount of preparation prior to making connections. When preparing to network, take a look at and refine your **essential networking tools**: **resume, business card, social media platform, elevator pitch**. These essential networking tools should be polished and ready to present when networking.

Resume
- Your resume is a summative document that represents your individual career experiences and accomplishments. Resumes are used to help people market themselves and serve as a first introduction between job seekers and employers. Your resume should help an employer understand the skills, abilities, and qualifications you possess in addition to the academic/work/service experiences, awards, and community involvement you have completed. It should also help the employer understand how these qualifications/experiences relate to their hiring needs.

- Resume writing is both a skill and an art form.   Writing a resume requires careful consideration, strategy, and construction each time you apply for a new position, but the resume also needs to reflect your personal brand so that when employers read it they understand both your value and relevance to their needs. Consider placing some key words that represent your personal brand throughout your resume document. For help constructing resumes, make an appointment with a career coach by calling (703) 284-5960 or visit our Resume and CV Writing for the College Student E-Guide.

Business Card
- You do not have to be employed to have a business card for networking use. You can print your own from Word templates or from downloading templates. You can also order your own business cards from companies like vistaprint.com that will allow you to design your own cards which they will print and cut for you (many free templates with printing as low as $10!). Regardless of method, it is important to have a business card handy to give to networking contacts. The card should have your name, contact information, and branding information (like your slogan, interests, and or/logo). If you have a LinkedIn profile or portfolio website, it is good to add these as well. Some people even construct QR codes for the back of their cards that people can scan with their phones and link directly to their websites.

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Social Media
- In today's world, social media platforms like LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, etc. serve as outlets for individual expression as well as an easy means of connecting with others. These platforms have become so prevalent that employers have starting using social media to recruit and evaluate talent. Social media may have originally been intended to connect people socially, but it is now an integral part of the professional world as

well. This means you must be mindful of what you are communicating through your social media, intentional about the content you contribute, and vigilant in terms of security.

- Social media is also a fantastic networking tool! Think of how many people you are connected to through your social networks online. Each one of those first, second, even third degree connections could be a useful networking contact. The key to online social networking is to monitor your presence, contribute professionally to the online community, and connect while communicating your personal brand. Some great ways to network online include:

- **Have a strong personal profile**- Your personal profile is a snapshot and summary of you that is available to EVERYONE on the internet. Because **privacy is never a guarantee on the web**, you must be mindful and intentional with the content you post. You do not have to have a profile on every social media website out there, but focus at least one (we suggest LinkedIn) on professional pursuits only. For your professional profile, include descriptions of your brand, experiences, skills/abilities, and other relevant information regarding your career path to make it easy for employers to search for and find you. Only professional pictures should be attached to this site and only professional posts should be allowed to remain on your page. This profile will serve as the landing page for recruiters and employers looking for candidates like you, so make it organized and well-branded. For all other websites you want to keep personal, be sure to update and maintain your privacy setting at all times. To ensure nothing is on the internet that you do not want there, perform a Google search on your name at least once every six months. If unwanted content is returned in the search, do everything in your power to have it removed.

- **Join and follow groups/individuals related to your interests and goals**- Most social media platforms have functions where you can follow, join, or manage groups. Groups usually form with some common interest or professional organization in mind that unites members, like "Architects of America" or "New Professionals in the Arts." Joining, following, or starting groups that you actively participate in is a great way to meet people you share interests with and would never otherwise meet. You can start up conversations with these individuals and make strong networking relationships just by chatting or emailing online. Groups are a great place to share information as well. You can ask questions, give/get advice, and discuss meaningful topics in your field of interest to get the networking ball rolling. Following influential individuals can be just as helpful as many influential professionals participate actively on social media pages to share information and help facilitate discussions.

- **Follow companies you are interested in**- Most American and many international companies have company pages on social media platforms. LinkedIn alone has over 200,000 companies with active pages worldwide. These pages are used as mini-websites that describe company missions and services, often in addition to career options and job openings. Following companies is a great way to get information on a company and find people who work at that company to connect with.

- **Find and make strategic professional connections**- The purpose of social media is to connect with others. You want to use your professional social media platform(s) to connect with key individuals that may be of benefit in your career development. To find these connections, you can search the connections of your current connections (a.k.a. second and third degree connections), join groups, follow companies, search for your university alumni (GREAT people to connect with; here are two links to MU [alumni Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#) pages), and stay active with professional postings and status updates so that connections can find you. Once you have found the connections, reach out and ask to connect to each person INDIVIDUALLY. Personalize your message to include why you would like to connect with them and emphasize how you would like to share information (remember, networking is a two-way street) and do NOT ask about available jobs. Remember to maintain your connection by actively participating in your social media platform.

Elevator Pitch (also known as the 30-second commercial)

- The "Elevator Pitch" is a 30 second (or less) mini-speech designed to start conversations while expressing your brand to others. It is called an "elevator" pitch because it should be no longer that the time it takes to go up a few floors in an elevator and would be the type of conversation you have with someone you just met (like someone in an elevator!). Your elevator pitch may include:
  - Handshake (a firm two pumps and then release)
  - Who you are: name, major, graduation year
  - Relevant work experience and internships
  - Relevant extracurricular activities/accomplishments
  - What kind of job you are looking for/interest in the company/professional special interests
  - Open question that engages the other person in more conversation

The questions you ask at the end of your pitch are the most important element of the pitch as they are what engages the other person. Ask open-ended questions that allow an individual to elaborate and say more than "yes" or "no." The more you can keep the other person talking, the longer the conversation will last and the more you will learn. Remember, networking is just as much about LISTENING as it is about TALKING. Engage others and they will engage you.

> *Example Elevator Pitch*:
> "Hi, my name is Mary Marymount and I am a Biology major at Marymount University. I am graduating in May, 2015 and I am really interested in taking my degree to the next level by working for an organization that focuses on environmentally-friendly products and services. Please tell me a little about your position and the kinds of projects you are currently working on."

The elevator pitch should contain some elements of your personal brand so as to help the person you are speaking with understand your unique qualities, abilities, and/or interests. Practice your elevator pitch in the mirror and with others until you feel comfortable and at ease when delivering the pitch. Come up with a variety of open-ended questions to keep the conversation interesting.

Use this guide to help you create your elevator pitch:

Introduction   *Background/Interest points*

*Name:*_____   1. _____
*Major:*_____   2. _____
Class Year: _____   3. _____

Questions for contact:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Create your elevator pitch:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

ACTION

You have created a personal brand and prepared your essential networking tools. Now it is time to take action! So, where do you start? Follow these steps:

1. **Create your personal network.**

    You may not know it, but you already have a great network of individuals to begin creating that web of connections. Your personal network is made up of what we call the 5F's: friends, family, faculty members, foundations/organizations you belong to (like clubs, honor societies, professional organizations), and fellow peers (classmates and alumni). To help organize your thoughts around this:

    I. **List and prioritize your 5F connections**- which connections are most relevant to your current job target? Focus on those connections first.

    II. **Connect with your personal network** – use face-to-face conversations (use your personal brand!), email, the telephone, and social media to reach out and let these connections know about your target and professional goals. Start gathering information!

2. **Get up, get out, and get involved to expand your personal network and start creating a professional network**

    The most effective networking happens when you actively participate in activities and events. Face-to-face meetings often facilitate the strongest relationships, so get out there!

    I. **Join and participate in on-campus activities**

    Here at MU there are multiple ways to get involved on campus. Join a club or organization, play a sport, study abroad, do research, or volunteer through on-campus organizations to help you meet new people and start creating that new professional network!

    II. **Go to conferences and professional organization/club events**

    Any event where people get together surrounding a common interest is a good place to network. Consider participating in research conferences, honor societies, clubs, and professional organizations to meet people who share your interests and are connected to opportunities in your field of interest.

    III. **Attend MU Career Services and Alumni Relations networking events**

    Career Services and Alumni Relations provide multiple opportunities each semester for Marymount students and alumni to mix and meet key individuals in all fields. For information on Career Services events, check our website, visit Jobs4Saints, like us on Facebook, or follow us on Twitter. For information regarding Alumni Relations, visit their website.

    IV. **Perform informational interviews**

    Informational interviews are interviews initiated by the job-seeker and performed with a person of interest. Informational interviews have a dual purpose: 1) to gain information on a job, company, or organization of interest and 2) to establish a networking connection. **NEVER ASK FOR A JOB IN AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW**! To set up an informational interview, simply identify a person who works in a job or for a company you are interested in. Contact them via phone, email, or social media and ask for 20 – 30 minutes of their time as you would love to learn more about their work. When the meeting is granted (in-person is preferable, but phone is acceptable), prepare at least ten questions to ask the professional about their work and experiences at their company. Be sure to **dress professionally** for the interview and send a thank you card/email after the interview is conducted. Here are some sample questions you may want to ask:

    - What does a typical day look like in your job?
    - What are the most important skills and abilities your job requires?
    - What kinds of educational experiences/majors are most relevant to your work?
    - Do you like your job? Why or why not?

- What do you think the most important values of your company are?
- What is your company's mission/vision and how to you support that?
- Do you work in teams often, or do you work mostly alone?
- What are your favorite things about the job? The least?
- What does your company look for in an ideal candidate for your position?
- How easy is it to balance work and personal life in this position?
- What kinds of professional development opportunities are available at your organization?
- Does your company often take on interns? If so, in what positions?

Do not ask personal questions like:
- How much money do you make a year?
- Can you get me a job?
- Are you married/do you have kids?
- What kind of benefits do you have?

3. **Utilize social media platforms to expand your professional network**

Social media is an excellent resource for networking and making connections. Reach out to contacts on your social media pages (Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Tumblr, LinkedIn, etc.) and have conversations. Follow companies, join groups, and participate in discussions. LinkedIn is an especially effective networking tool as the site was created to facilitate networking and professional connections between people. Choose your connections wisely; do not just add anyone you think you know or have heard of. You want your network to be full of useful and credible connections. Jobs and internships are also often posted through social media platforms, so be sure to check out any "Job" tabs and follow companies that you are interested in working for to check their social media career pages.

I. **Using LinkedIn**

This social media platform has become essential to the professional networking world. LinkedIn has many fantastic features to help job seekers and students connect and learn as well as tutorials regarding how to maximize your personal profile and overall experience. Here is a great guide for creating a strong profile and networking effectively on LinkedIn. For personal assistance in creating your LinkedIn profile, contact Career Services at (703) 284-5960 to make an appointment with a career coach.

4. **Be friendly!**

You never know where you might meet a great networking connection. You could be sitting on the bus, chatting before class, or in line at the supermarket and magically meet someone who would make a great connection. Always have your essential networking tools handy and go make friends!

MAINTAINING YOUR PROFESSIONAL NETWORK

Congratulations on creating a fabulous network! Now that you have established your web of professional connections, you have to MAINTAIN it! It is not enough to reach out to contacts only when you need something from them. How would you feel if the only time someone tried to talk to you was when they wanted something from you? Well your networking contacts are people too and they (just like you) enjoy feeling valued. To maintain your network, you have to continue interacting with your contacts even when you have no immediate career need. Sharing information, quick social calls/emails/cards, and making introductions to others are all ways to keep the relationship going. Here are some tips to help you maintain your network:

- **Organize your contacts**- Find a way to help you remember the contacts you have made. One way to do this is to alphabetize your connections in a blank notebook and write brief descriptions of your interactions (including dates) to help you remember what each person does and is interested in. You can also keep your business cards in a Rolodex and make sure to go through them once a month to see if you need to reach out to anyone for maintenance. Alternatively, use a Google calendar to set pop-up reminders in your email that tells you when to reach out to certain connections. Whatever method you choose (and there are many, pick one that works for you!), be consistent and make sure to stay up to date with connections as much as

possible. Following connections on LinkedIn may help with this as any posts or events your connections have will be automatically updated in your newsfeed. Check your LinkedIn account at least twice a week.

- **Follow up after interactions** – When you meet a networking contact or when a contact does something nice for you, follow up! Send an invitation to connect on LinkedIn or other social media outlets. Send a "thank you" email/social media message when a connection does something nice for you/shares information with you and offer to assist them in the future as well. Communicating thanks and offering your time and attention goes a long way in maintaining a relationship.
- **Share information –** When you get a great piece of information (like an article, news about an event, etc.), let any of your contacts who might be interested know what you learned! Sharing information is fast and easy in today's internet-driven world, so link out to interesting information on your social media page, email connections personalized emails with links or attachments, or give your connections a call to let them know what great information you have come across. Your connections will appreciate your extra effort and will be more inclined to share important information with you in the future.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AT THE CENTER FOR CAREER SERVICES

In addition to the information and examples this e-guide offers, the Center for Career Services also provides the following services and materials to support the development of your personal brand and networking strategies. Our staff strongly encourages ALL students and alumni to take advantage of these FREE resources!

- **Individual Career Appointments**
    - o Make an appointment at Career Services and a Career Coach will sit down with you to discuss how to develop your personal branding and networking strategies.
    - o Students and alumni can schedule an appointment with a Career Coach by calling 703-284-5960.   If you are not able to come in, we are happy to arrange a phone appointment as an alternative – just let us know you are interested in this option when you call!
    - o When scheduling an appointment, the more specific information you can provide in terms of what type of positions you are looking for and what background you currently have, the better our Career Coaches can tailor their support during the appointment.
- **Career Services Workshops & Events**
    - o Our office hosts a variety of workshops throughout the academic year, several of which focus on cover letter and resume writing, networking, the job and internship search, and professional behavior. In addition, we host industry-specific panel events, which serve as great opportunities to network with current professionals and fellow peers and can even potentially lead to interview opportunities! For an up-to-date list of upcoming workshops and events, visit our website.
    - o If you are a student and would like to request a workshop or presentation for an organization or club that you are a part of on campus, please email career.services@marymount.edu with your name, club/organization, and potential dates and times for your workshop and we will follow up with you!
- **Print Resources on Networking and Personal Branding**
    - o The Center for Career Services has a library of career resource books in the lobby of our main office in Rowley, Suite 1005 that students can check out for a period of two weeks.
    - o For a full list of our print resources, including those specific to personal branding and networking, check out this document.