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THE JUNGLE

Networking Web Sites Present New Arena for Job Searchers

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Tina Mitiguy remained unemployed after exhausting most traditional job-search techniques earlier this year. Then she was invited by a friend to join [LinkedIn.com](#)¹, an online networking site. A few days later, a manager using the site spotted her online profile and contacted her about a job opening. The next week, she was hired.


"I felt just incredibly fortunate at the time, because not only was it a job but a really good fit for my background," says Ms. Mitiguy, who is 31 years old. She joined RedMedic Inc., a San Jose, Calif., start-up that creates portable medical records for patients, as director of member services.

The story is more remarkable when one considers that Ken Toren, the vice president of marketing for RedMedic who contacted Ms. Mitiguy, didn't post an ad anywhere for the job. Nor has he considered hiring a search firm to fill other positions at the company. So far, he has done all his sourcing on LinkedIn.

"When you put an ad out, you find some good people," Mr. Toren says. "If you use a network like LinkedIn, it's a much more trusted environment."

A growing number of Internet sites are weaving digital webs of people and enabling them to take the practice of personal networking to a new level that might be called hypernetworking. Sites such as [Spoke.com](#)², [Tribe.net](#)³, [Ryze.com](#)⁴, [Friendster.com](#)⁵ and LinkedIn.com are free and allow people to expand their networks exponentially in many cases. Some sites emphasize professional contacts, while others are more socially focused. Most sites, including LinkedIn, are open to all comers. In all cases, the sites present a tantalizing new arena for job seekers.

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"What we're really doing is creating new media to do the same thing we do when we meet at a cocktail party," says Gerry Crispin, a principal of CareerXroads, a recruiting-technology consulting company in Kendall Park, N.J. He

believes the implications for job seekers could be profound as more people get comfortable using the sites and connecting with people they meet online through mutual acquaintances.

The sites could be especially useful for job seekers who want to find contacts who work for a particular company or who are in a certain industry or profession, since users can typically search for people using a wide range of criteria. Many sites provide users with a kind of networking road map that shows them how many degrees of separation lie between them and a desired contact.

Mr. Crispin advises job seekers who use the sites to be upfront about their intentions when asking a contact to introduce them to the next person in the chain. For instance, you might want to get a referral for a job opening from an employee at a company to boost your chances when you apply for the position.

But he also cautions people to carefully read each site's privacy policies. "I think there are some privacy issues left unanswered," he says.

Others stress that even though a quick search can reveal attractive potential contacts, you still need to be prepared to build long-term relationships. Laura Allen, co-founder of 15SecondPitch.com, a New York company that teaches networking skills, says many people have a mistrust of connections made strictly via e-mail.

On Friendster, she is herself connected to 300,000 people through 17 contacts. "That's not very useful to me, because I'm not going to make contact with most of those people. They're too far removed," says Ms. Allen. She recommends meeting online contacts in person whenever possible. "They're more likely to pass on your information if you've met them face to face," she says.

Networking groups that don't have as broad a reach but are more targeted can also supplement a burgeoning network. Some of these groups often have an online component, but they often also organize informal gatherings on a regular basis. Ms. Allen belongs to [CareerChangeNetwork.com](#)⁸ for people considering new career paths and [Dinnergrl.org](#)⁹, a networking group for women.

Ultimately, even when using online sites, job seekers shouldn't let the rules of traditional networking fly out the window. Below are three top rules that job seekers need to keep in mind for any networking scenario:

Remember to say "thank you" to the person who provided an introduction for you and send an update of your progress.

Announce your intentions. Be clear about exactly how contacts can help you, and tell them what a potential benefit could be for them. A third party you end up helping, for example, might be grateful to your contact for making the introduction.

Build relationships before you need them. "Avoid 911 networking," says Diane Darling, president of Effective Networking Inc., a Boston networking-consulting firm. "If you need a job now, you need to rely on yesterday's relationships."

In the end, a network with hundreds of names will still likely need to be whittled down, because you can sustain only a limited number of solid personal relationships. "All the technology in the world can't beat a personal referral," says Ms. Darling.

Please e-mail comments to Kris.Maher@wsj.com¹⁰; to see previous columns, go to www.CareerJournal.com¹¹.

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