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Lamorinda Residents Tap Technology for Career and Business Opportunities

By Jennifer Wake



Social and professional networking sites Photo Jennifer Wake

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With current economic conditions causing increased job losses and fewer business opportunities, more people are turning to technology to network within their industry, to keep up with industry trends, or to find business opportunities.

Lamorinda resident, author, radio host, and actor Cynthia Brian approaches her business much differently today than just three years ago. "We are in a different age," she said.

As an actor, Brian frequently auditions for commercials, and used to go through her agent and fly to Los Angeles for auditions. "Now, I send my profile and demo reel online, and they decide whether they want you to come in."

In addition to her personal endeavors, Brian is also founder of Be the Star You Are, a non-profit organization dedicated to empowering women, families and youth through improved literacy and positive media exposure. She currently has information about her organization posted on several networking sites, like MySpace, as well as on its own Web site. "What's important is to understand what it is you're trying to market," Brian said.

One site Brian says is exceptional is LinkedIn - a business-oriented social networking site launched in 2003. "If you're looking for an overall professional site, I think this is the best one in the United States."

Moraga resident Nick Baturin heard about LinkedIn from recruiter Jamie Bott at Barclays Global Investors (BGI), where he worked as a research officer. "She used to be at Google and is a power user of web networking tools," he said. "She encouraged me to get on LinkedIn."

With more than 30 million members, LinkedIn allows its members to not only connect with potential employers, consultants or business partners, but is by invitation only, so users have control over who they choose to connect with. It also allows users to search job listings and connect with hiring managers.

Baturin, who has a Ph.D. in physical oceanography, a master's of science in applied physics and math, and has the Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA) designation, was laid off last month after nine years at BGI, one of thousands

affected by the financial meltdown. He has used LinkedIn to reconnect with former colleagues, and is building his network to include people who share his experience in the investment management industry.

"I like the network update feature. It tells you about what's been happening in your network in the last few days (e.g. who connected to whom, and who updated their profile)," said Baturin, who has received some useful job leads through the LinkedIn connections. "In the last few weeks I have been investing time in expanding the network - mostly connecting with people I already knew, but also with some new ones."

In addition to professional networking sites like LinkedIn, some job seekers are writing blogs that are specific to their expertise or creating personal Web sites and posting resumes online. One Lamorinda resident, who asked not to be named, posted his resume on his personal Web site. He was contacted two days later by a Google recruiter regarding a job.

"They have Web spiders that are constantly trolling the Web to look for key word matches," he said.

During the past few years, there has been a proliferation of both professional and social networking sites that bring people together virtually. Additionally, new software platforms have been developed that allow users to create a network of their own.

In 2004, Gina Bianchini and Marc Andreessen (of Netscape fame) launched Ning.com - a platform that lets users (from artists to educators, journalists to scientists) develop their own unique online community.

Brian is a part of two Ning sites, one for radio hosts (radiohosts.ning.com) and the other for authors (pumpupyourbookpromotion.ning.com). "I could start my own gardening site, and invite all gardeners," said Brian, who has written a bestselling gardening book and regularly writes a gardening column for Lamorinda Weekly.

The trickiest part - whether you are creating your own site or joining an existing one - is choosing which sites are right for you.

"You can't do all of them," Brian said. "You would need an assistant to keep up with them all."

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