

Keep in touch with your alma mater

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Networking is a critical part of any job search and an essential tool in achieving your long-term career goals. People often neglect a very significant source of keeping connected. That's their college or alma mater. Staying in touch with your alma mater gives you an edge in finding fellow alumni with whom you can network.

It's much easier to stay connected if you went to school in the city or state where you work. But with today's advancing technology and social media networks, reconnecting to alumni is easier than ever. Chances are that your college has an alumni relations link on its website.

"We all know that picking up the phone and calling a stranger is difficult. As alumni, graduates share a common bond of experience on campus with professors and administrators, as a part of sports teams, and as members of clubs and organizations," said Mary Elizabeth Cotleur, director of alumni relations at Notre Dame College in South Euclid.

Those common experiences make for an instant connection in networking. Calling a fellow classmate about a job or other opportunity isn't cold calling at all, she said. Beyond the career search, finding fellow alumni in your field of work is another way to share resources and ideas for career advancement.

Start building your network before you leave school

The best time to build your network is before you graduate from college. Get to know your career

services representative and make a point to stop by your alumni relations office.

After you leave college, keep your alma mater updated regarding your address and job changes. Be sure to keep your phone number and e-mail current, as well.

For those who have long since walked the halls of their alma mater, investigating the calendar of events or reading archived alumni newsletters and magazines are good ways to get reacquainted. You might be surprised to see how much the school has grown since you graduated. If you can, plan a campus visit, possibly during an upcoming alumni or reunion weekend.

Take it a step further by volunteering your time or attending regular social functions or clubs that are designed to attract alumni participation. Not only will you add to your network, but you will most likely rekindle long-lost friendships.

Go virtual

The latest and most efficient way to touch base with your alma mater is by connecting via social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn groups. Your school's alumni section on its website probably includes a link for most of these online sites.

"The Internet allows colleges to communicate with alumni on an up-to-the-minute basis. By accessing all of the online alumni tools, you'll be the first to know what's going on and how you can get involved," Cotleur said. "You can also join an alumni career network for both peer-to-peer interaction and alumni-to-student mentoring."