Chapter 11
Networking Platforms

“Social media is not a media. The key is to listen, engage, and build relationships.”
~David Alston, technology and marketing startup entrepreneur

11.1 Know the Playing Field
The technology and software landscape changes quickly, but this chapter covers currently relevant platforms and their uses, various apps, and other forms of relevant remote networking, such as phone use and email. Certain players in the online domain have staying power and are likely to be relevant for a while to come, such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. However, new competitors regularly enter the market, and there is no way to know for sure what will remain relevant, what will fade away, and what new platform may upset the status quo. For example, Google+ for consumers was shut down on April 2, 2019. Regardless, this chapter covers currently relevant platforms and their uses.

The exercises at the end of Chapter 10 were designed to provide you with a general idea of how you would like to engage with your network via content, and to create a schedule for your digital and social media usage. As you read, look for platforms that will be useful towards these goals and plans, and make notes about which remote networking methods you would like to further research or pursue.

11.2 Suggestions for Basic Etiquette and Use
The same etiquette caveats that apply to in-person interactions (see Section 4.4) also apply in the digital realm. The applicability of the following suggestions will depend on the scenarios and cultures involved. As you consider proper etiquette for remote, digital, and online networking, remember the core principles of sustainable networking: kindness and interacting in a mutually beneficial way that allows people to be comfortable.

Many of the methods of communication described here involve typed text, and the quality of that text is important. First, do your best to avoid misspellings and other typographical errors. Your text doesn’t have to be perfect, but errors will add noise and distract from the message you are trying to communicate. When you send someone a message or make a post, re-read or proofread your messages. By
cleaning up your messages, you make your reader or readers more comfortable, which reflects well on you and your communication abilities. On the other side, remember to be patient with the occasional typo: it happens to all of us.

Note that text written all in uppercase is, in many circumstances, considered to be the textual equivalent of yelling. And just as yelling is inappropriate during face-to-face professional interactions, so too should you consider it inappropriate in your professional digital networking. Text is also a difficult medium through with to communicate emotions, so limit your use of sarcasm, which is easy to misunderstand in written form, and consider possible ambiguities or erroneous interpretations of your wording.

Regarding the content of your text, always be professional and respectful, even if you believe you are speaking in a closed forum. It may be tempting to respond sharply to someone who is being rude or difficult, but remember that (a) it is possible that you have misconstrued their tone and meaning and they are perhaps not intending to create the impression that you are getting, and (b) if you lose your temper online, what you write in response can be reported, with or without the statements leading up to it as context. Your test to determine if something is appropriate to post is to imagine what would happen if it were shared with your whole network. If you wouldn’t want that, don’t post it.

It can be difficult to maintain your composure when you do not receive a response from people within your desired time frame. However, you do not know all of the details of the other person’s life, and a circumstance that has nothing to do with you might keep them from responding in a timely fashion. Don’t let impatience prompt you to send a grouchy email because you haven’t received an answer. Following up is acceptable, but it should be positive, friendly, and professional. If you lose your temper and it turns out the other party was on vacation or away due to a death in the family, you will appear insensitive. Even if your worst fears are true and they are ignoring you, an irate response will bring negative attention, and it will not improve your chances of an answer.

At the other extreme, you might participate in a back-and-forth chat conversation via text message or email where you and the other party respond immediately. When an otherwise asynchronous form of communication is being used in synchronous fashion but you need to discontinue, it is generally good manners to excuse yourself, just as you would on the phone or in person. This lets the other party or parties know that you have to stop responding right away.

As for receiving and sending connection requests for social media accounts that you use professionally, avoid connecting with people you do not know. Only send or accept connection requests to and from people with whom you are familiar and would be willing to endorse on the strength of your reputation. You should be able to say something positive or supportive about the person’s abilities. If they aren’t someone you feel comfortable saying, “I know this person, and I recommend them,” then don’t send or accept a connection with them.
The last chapter briefly discussed the value of being interactive. If online conversations are the equivalent of real-life conversations, then posting but never responding to others’ posts is like monologuing instead of creating a dialogue. The principle of equitable exchange, which is important for sustainable networking, applies to online networking venues, too. Consistency is also helpful: it is hard to establish a reputation if you are never or seldom active. You do not need to be high frequency or dedicate large amounts of time to the enterprise, but try to be regularly and consistently involved on those platforms that you have chosen.

Finally, use good passwords for your accounts. A weak password, or the same password across multiple platforms, puts you at risk of getting hacked. If someone breaks into your account, then they will have access to a lot of your personal information, can imitate you or steal from you, and cause problems for your connections. If necessary, a password management system can help you remember your passwords. Strong, regularly updated passwords are important for both you and your network.

11.3 Platforms

There are many platforms, and it can be hard to decide which ones to use. When considering platforms, the key is to balance two factors: (a) where is your professional community most active, and (b) where are you most comfortable? You want to be where your colleagues are, and you want the best match for the type of content you wish to provide (play to your strengths). Pick one or two platforms where you will dedicate your time and attention. Don’t try to frequently use many platforms, this will be an energy drain, and spreading yourself thin won’t allow you to do each one well. Only use as many as you can do well, while conserving your time and energy for work productivity. The goal is to be efficient but also to have relevant content about yourself for others to find and to find ways to benefit your connections in a way that plays to your strengths.

Author Anecdote

I was once contacted through LinkedIn regarding a job opportunity from a potential employer. This person opened with a personalized message and connection request. I answered their message and set up a call, but I waited to accept their connection request until after the call, which went well. They made a positive impression on me, and so I accepted the connection. A few weeks later, I received an email from a friend whom they had also contacted. He only accepted their request for a call because he had a mutual connection with them: me. He saw my connection with them as an indicator that they were trustworthy, because he trusted me. This is why I never accept requests from people I don’t know; I don’t want to mislead my existing connections.
11.3.1 Phone and video calls

Because phone and video calls are synchronous forms of communication, it is best to plan calls in advance, which ensures that the other person or persons are available when you want to speak. As a general rule, calls with more than two people should always be planned in advance due to possible schedule conflicts. You will sometimes achieve spontaneous calls between two people, but you can still run into scheduling conflicts. Using an asynchronous form of communication to schedule the call, such as email or text message, is the best practice. When scheduling a call, offer more than one possible day or time that works for you to give the person options, and let them know roughly how long you anticipate the call will be.

As with almost all networking, prepare in advance. Review your research on the person if they are new or if you speak with them infrequently. Have relevant materials or notes available for you to refer to during the call. Take the call in a quiet place in consideration of literal signal-to-noise. If you are making a video call, as opposed to an audio-only phone call, dress appropriately for the formality of the call. Also consider what will appear in the background of your image; position yourself and your webcam accordingly to eliminate visual noise. For example, don’t take the call in your bedroom with a pile of clothes on an unmade bed in the background.

When you make the call, identify yourself immediately to the person who answers. Don’t make them guess or assume someone will be able to identify you by the sound of your voice, even if you have scheduled the call for that time. Doing so only sets you up for an awkward situation if they get it wrong. There is also a possibility that an administrative assistant will answer the person’s calls and that you will not reach the person directly. If you know this to be the case, you can state your name and that you have a call with Dr. Pak at 10:30 (fill in the relevant time and name).

If you are making an unscheduled call or a cold call (i.e., the person does not know you; see Section 12.6), don’t ask to speak to the person at length. Instead, succinctly state your purpose, and ask if you could set up a time for a discussion or if now is an okay time. Even if your intended conversation is brief, ask if they have one or two minutes to spare before proceeding. This expresses consideration for the other person’s time. If the answer is no, don’t take it personally, and arrange to call back another time.

There are several considerations to keep in mind during a call. You may want to take notes, but do so with pen and paper, as typing on a keyboard can create unwanted noise. Your posture and body language during the call will affect your verbal delivery, even if it is an audio-only call. For example, people can differentiate smile types with only audio cues. If you have an important call to make, either sit up straight at your desk or take the call while standing. If you are having a casual conversation, sitting in a relaxed fashion is fine. Always inform someone if you have them on speakerphone, and let them know who is present, lest they say something that they do not want overhead. Avoid eating and drinking
while on the call: it can create unpleasant sounds or visuals for the other party and
distract you when you should be giving them your full attention.

What you talk about during the call will depend on whether it is a meeting, a
social call, or an informational interview. Phone conversations generally follow
the same etiquette as in-person conversations. Resist the urge to fill silence, and
allow for pauses in conversation so that everyone gets a chance to speak as needed.
Refer to any notes you wrote in advance to ensure that you address all desired
topics. If you accidentally interrupt the other person, which is hard to avoid with
signal lag or the lack of visual cues, excuse yourself and say, “please go ahead.”
When you are finished with the call, thank the person for their time, say that it was
time to speak with them, say goodbye, give them time to respond, and hang up.

Send a follow up afterwards with another thank you. You can review any
action items that were discussed (tasks to be completed after the call), or if there
were none, you can simply say that you had a nice conversation. If there were
people who couldn’t attend a group call, include them in your follow up along with
a summary of relevant information and the conclusions or actions going forward.

There are a variety of services that you can use for voice and video calls,
including Skype, Hangouts, Zoom Meeting, and WebEx, to name a few. Many
include audio-only, video, and group calling options but may require software
installation, so set up the service before you plan to use it.

### 11.3.2 Email

Email is a great tool for traversing time zones that allows you to send messages at
any time without intruding the way a phone call might. It is also good to use when
you want to have a documented trail of progress, including agreed upon action
items or a record of scheduling, which you cannot get on the phone. Storage and
organization of correspondence is easy with email, and most people in STEM
fields will use it, though some people don’t use personal accounts with much
frequency.

If you are using a personal email address for professional purposes, as
opposed to an employer-provided one, make sure that the username and address
are professional, ideally consisting of some combination of your name and initials.
If your name is Mae McPerson, then usernames such as mmcperson,
mae.mcperson, mcpersonm, and similar variations are good. Avoid usernames that
are silly nicknames, off-color, or not clearly related to you and your work. The best
email address is one that does not call attention to itself; it should be simple and
make sense. If this means migrating to a new email address, do it.

Basic etiquette regarding text content and quality, as described in the general
etiquette section, should be observed in email. Whether you are contacting
someone new, following up, or touching base with a contact, use a succinct,
descriptive subject line, and a brief, focused message. Re-read what you have
written, pare it down, and check it for errors. It is slow and frustrating to decipher
a garbled or rambling message, which will reduce your chances of receiving a
response, particularly if you are contacting someone new. Having some kind of
action item in mind is good, which can be as simple as suggesting a short phone
call, if you are thinking of proceeding with some kind of business or collaboration with this person.

When you send an email but you don’t get a response, don’t be afraid to follow up. As mentioned previously, keep it polite, don’t sound annoyed, and be persistent. Check your email regularly and answer in a timely fashion, ideally within 12 hours for business items, though sooner is better in most cases. On the other hand, it is possible to check email too frequently; checking it less frequently can reduce stress. Personal email can have longer response times, but the more formal a message is, the sooner you should respond. If the message is urgent, from a very important person, or states that it requires an immediate response, respond as soon as possible. If it is a longer message, requires some thought, or input from others, reply to say that the message has been received and when you expect to have an answer. If you discover a long-forgotten email in your inbox, respond to it and make a brief apology; it doesn’t have to be elaborate, but be genuine, acknowledge the lapse, and do your best to respond to the message.

If you are included in an email that has been sent to multiple people, be judicious with your use of “reply all.” No one likes to deal with irrelevant emails, so only reply to the necessary parties. Likewise, don’t mass-forward chain emails. You only want to send thoughtful content, so forward content to one or two people if you think the information will be useful and relevant to them professionally.

When you are away from your email, write an automatic response with an appropriate message. It should include information such as when you expect to be back and how to reach you or who else to contact if the matter is urgent. Remember to disable the auto-responder upon your return.

11.3.3 SMS and texting

Texting, that is, the use of SMS and messaging apps, is another text-based, asynchronous form of communication. Compared to email, it is more immediate, because most people have notifications set up on their phones to let them know when a text message arrives, which is often not the case for email. This means that people tend to read and respond to their text messages sooner, making texting better than email for reaching someone quickly, making last-minute arrangements, or sending updates regarding in-person meetings. Even though it is an asynchronous communication method, the immediacy and notifications mean that you should text only during the normal hours when you would expect the recipient to be awake; if it is a formal relationship, restrict texting to business hours.

Texting is a remote but direct communication method, so it can be a temptation to communicate more informally via text message than you would in person. Before you send a message, imagine making that statement in person. If the idea makes you uncomfortable, delete or reword your message until it passes the test. Like any kind of digital networking, your messages can be saved, shared, and publicized, and remember that some people have lost their jobs over private text messages.
Texting is generally not necessary for business purposes, even though it can be convenient. If you do not already have a texting feature or messaging app for personal use, it is probably not necessary to add it for professional use.

11.3.4 LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a social media website that focuses on business and professional connections, with 610 million users in 200 countries.\textsuperscript{14} The United States is where it is the most popular, with 150 million users, but it is also popular in India (52 million users), China (44 million users), Brazil (34 million users), and the UK (25 million users), with a total of 562 million users in 200 countries.\textsuperscript{15}

It is particularly valuable as a networking tool because of its ability to identify mutual connections you have with another LinkedIn user. The value of this tool cannot be understated. If you know there is a person you want to meet or get to know, and you can look them up on LinkedIn, the site will find your common connections, making it easy to know who to ask for an introduction. It also has many of the usual social media features, including a newsfeed, the ability to make posts that can be followed, groups related to workspaces, schools, and interests, as well as direct messaging. Video courses are also available.

The basic account for LinkedIn is free, and it is possible to participate fully in the LinkedIn community with a free account. A premium membership has more features, including the ability to contact people even if you’re not connected (in the free version, you can only send messages to connections), see everyone who views your profile, get job listings curated for you, and more. For individuals, LinkedIn Premium Career currently costs $29.99 USD/month, with a one-month free trial available.

A LinkedIn account includes a profile page where you can list your education, work information, skills, volunteer experience, awards, publications, and more. Just as you should be networking for the job you want or the goals you have, you should write your LinkedIn profile accordingly. Complete it with as much relevant information as possible. Just as you can use your goals to curate what networking activities you pursue, use them to curate the content that you provide. If it does not support your goal or is unrelated to the job you do or want to do, it can serve as a distraction (reducing your signal-to-noise ratio), and it doesn’t need to be included. At a minimum, fill out your “about” statement, your education and work history, and then carefully check it for typographical errors. The default URL for your account comes with a unique string of numbers at the end that can be difficult to remember, so take advantage of the URL customization feature. Replace the alphanumeric string with some variation of your name (you can make it more unique by adding your initials).

Endorsements of skills and recommendations are a part of the social media aspect of your LinkedIn profile. When you add skills to your profile, LinkedIn will automatically ask your connections for endorsements. This is done with just a few clicks. You can navigate to a connection’s skill section of their profile and endorse their skills, which is a simple and easy way to do something helpful for that person. Recommendations are a similar feature, where you can write a statement saying...
how you know the person and what you think of them professionally. This takes more work than endorsements but carries more weight. If you had a bad experience with someone, it is generally not worth writing a bad public review; LinkedIn reviews are not the right venue for complaints and may reflect poorly upon you.

Another important part of your profile is your photo. It helps people to find you from among similar profiles and lets people know you are a real person (not a scammer or bot). Use a clear, professional-looking picture of yourself, including your shoulders and your face. You should be recognizable and dressed appropriately for your line of work. No photo, or a photo that is blurry, poorly cropped, or unprofessional, conveys a lack of attention to detail. If you want to go one step further and make your image more memorable, you can find a subtle and small way to push the norm of what is typical for your profession. Look at the photos of those who are in similar positions and lines of work, and find a way to make your photograph stand out while staying to theme, e.g., an interesting accessory, garment, or haircut.

When adding new connections, LinkedIn gives you a standard connection message when you send an invitation. It is essential to personalize the message, reminding the person of how you know each other, your real-life connection, etc., the same as you would in a follow-up email. Exceptions to this rule are people who you know, without any doubt, will remember you easily, such as people with whom you have a long-standing relationship. As a point of general etiquette, do not invite people you do not know to connect, and do not send impersonal connection requests to new acquaintances. Likewise, do not accept connections with people who you do not know. You do not want to publicly declare a connection, which is an implication of support, with someone you know nothing about.

In addition to a profile, you will have a newsfeed that shows posts and activity made by your connections; you can make posts, as well, which will be shared with them. Curate who you are following, populating your feed with useful information, rather than having to dig through irrelevant items to get to what you want. This process becomes more important the more connections that you have. There is a difference between following and connecting on this platform, and you can unfollow people without disconnecting from them. You can also order your feed by either most recent posts or top posts (though how LinkedIn determines a “top post” is opaque). It is also possible to follow companies and hashtags to see their content in your feed.

Whatever you post will show up in your followers’ newsfeeds; currently, “following” is the default setting when you connect with someone. You can share articles that you find interesting, news stories, your successes (such as getting a promotion or getting an award), or your research or projects (so long as it is okay with your employer). Think about the kind of content you want to share: it should align with your goals, be valuable to your followers, and reflect the professional focus of the site.

There are also groups that you can join within the LinkedIn community that will give you content and discussions specific to their theme. Pick ones that
accurately reflect your interests and goals, whether it relates to your current research, if you are trying to network into a new area or learning about a new subject. Group members can read posts, comment, and participate in discussions in a group, allowing everyone to get to know each other. Groups can be related to schools you have attended, research interests, employers, geographical location, and more. Join a few that interest you and fit your overall strategy. The groups you join will be displayed in your profile, giving others more information about you.

LinkedIn also offers job listings, some of which can be applied for directly through the site. Recruiters use the site, and your profile can be enabled to let them know you are looking for work. If your current employer is unaware that you are planning to change jobs, note that job-seeking activities, such as joining job-seeking groups, might be shared with your network, depending on your privacy settings. As your network likely includes current colleagues, review your settings with respect to job seeking, especially if you have not yet publicly shared that you are considering alternative employment.

11.3.5 ResearchGate

ResearchGate is another professional social media site, with a focus on publications and questions. A survey by *Nature* found that of scholars who regularly use social media, ResearchGate was the most popular site.\(^{16}\) It allows users to share the texts of their publications with other users, as well as post and respond to research-related questions. Like LinkedIn, it offers a profile, newsfeed of items from the people you follow, job listings, and direct messaging, but there are no groups. Under your profile, there are site stats, showing how many times other users have read your publications, the number of publications you have listed, and how many questions you have posted or answered. These scores are compiled into an aggregate “RG Score,” which speaks to the amount of research you have available and how many people interact with your content (includes Q&A), though there have been objections to the platform’s opaque scoring methodology.\(^{17}\)

Creating and maintaining an account is free, but you need an email address from a recognized institute or university; you can’t sign up with a personal email address. When filling out your profile, include relevant details and a professional image of yourself, the same as for a LinkedIn profile. After signing up, you will be asked to identify your publications. You are automatically connected with your co-authors, and you can follow their activities and the publications of other researchers. You can share full-text versions of your papers, either publicly or upon request, and you can read and request the same from other researchers.

Be careful about publicly posting full texts of publications that are not open access. Copyright law varies from country to country, but generally, publishers of scientific research papers, not the authors, hold the copyrights for those papers. If the paper is open access and not behind a paywall, it is already freely shared, so posting it publicly is typically fine. However, if you go around a publisher’s paywall by posting a copy publicly (even if you are the author), you may be in copyright violation. As a result of some lawsuits, ResearchGate has made
substantial changes to its paper-sharing practices, and some authors receive take-
down notices because of copyright violations. 18

Whether or not you can legally share a non-open-access full-text paper with
someone directly will depend on the circumstances and applicable copyright laws.
The debate over open access, copyright, and modern publishing is a topic of rich
debate, and is especially important to think about if you have an academic job with
an emphasis on publications.

11.3.6 Facebook

As of this writing, Facebook is one of the most popular social networking websites
in the world, with over 2.3 billion users, 19 and its primary focus for individual users
is personal use. Users do not have to be individuals, and many businesses, public
figures, and musical groups have accounts (pages) as well. While it is primarily
personal for many people, some jobs will require you to have and use a Facebook
account, blending the personal and professional. Decide how you want to use it
and adjust your privacy settings appropriately. Some choose to maintain both a
personal and a professional Facebook account, but the separation can be hard to
manage.

Facebook accounts are free, and you can sign up with a personal email
address. Features include a profile page, a newsfeed, direct messaging, groups,
event listings, and a marketplace where you can purchase items for other users.
Because of the personal nature of Facebook, connections are called “Friends.”
There is no way to recommend or endorse friends as you would on LinkedIn, but
you can leave reviews for businesses and groups with pages. There is also no
publications aspect, like that for ResearchGate.

Feed curation is important for Facebook. By default, when you add a friend
you become a follower of their content. Like LinkedIn, you can unfollow people
without unfriending them, and you have the option to follow pages created by
business and organizations. Facebook gives you the power to categorize your
friends into subgroups called “lists,” such as “close friends,” “acquaintances,” and
shared employers; you also can create your own list titles. This allows you to share
posts with a specific group, and not with others, which is a key feature if you plan
to keep the same account for both personal and professional uses. Further feed
curation options include whether you see activities such as likes, comments, posts,
tags, or posts in groups you joined.

All of these features come with many settings, and there is a lot to consider
when it comes to privacy on Facebook. The company has been criticized due to its
handling of user data, 20 and so it is worth the investment of time to explore the
settings and think about what type of content you want to share and with whom.

11.3.7 Twitter

Twitter is a social media platform that covers almost any subject, both professional
and personal. What makes Twitter unique is its character limit: text for a twitter
post, called a “tweet,” cannot exceed 280 characters. Images can also be posted,
and the 280-character limit still applies. These features relate to the history of Twitter and its inception before smartphones and apps, when tweets were made via text message and limited to the 140 characters of standard SMS; it only recently doubled the character limit in 2017. Tweets are publicly visible by default, which is part of Twitter’s appeal as a public forum. Twitter has fewer features compared to LinkedIn and Facebook, including a limited profile, newsfeed (based on who and what you follow), making tweets, re-tweeting, commenting, and direct messaging.

Twitter is a continuous deluge of information, available to all, with approximately 500 million tweets sent per day, or over 5000 tweets per second. Twitter does not have a groups function where you can seek themed information, so hashtags are used to navigate this massive flow of information. A hashtag begins with a #, called a hash or pound sign (though its little-known technical name is the octothorpe\(^24\)), followed by keywords with no spaces, such as #womeninSTEM (for “women in STEM”). Many other social media platforms, including LinkedIn and Facebook, currently use hashtags, but the format originated on Twitter. It came into use during a wildfire in San Diego, CA, USA, when users began including the hashtag #sandiegofire in posts about the fire to make them more searchable. This is the purpose of hashtags: to make it easier to search for specific information. By searching for #PhotonicsWest2020 instead of “Photonics West 2020,” you only find tweets with the desired hashtag, as opposed to search results that include tweets about photonics, the West, and the year 2020. You can also follow hashtags as you would a person.

Because Twitter is public and searchable, it is highly interactive. If you are interested in contacting someone, possibly an author of a publication you liked, you might be able to contact them via Twitter by tagging them in a tweet, commenting on their tweet, or via a direct message. So long as the person isn’t famous, in which case they will be continually deluged with tweets, there is a high probability they will see and respond to your message. Conversations started in the reply thread of a Tweet may also allow you to interact with people of interest. Reaching out to journalists on Twitter is a great way to make contacts if you are hoping to get press coverage, but make sure that what you want to share is relevant to the journalist you are contacting. Retweeting their stories and providing them with references, if they are looking for sources, is a great way to offer them assistance and make a good impression.

Twitter has a much more limited profile system, including your Twitter handle (@yourname), photo, URL, location, and a caption. The rest of your profile consists of your tweets, retweets, and comments, which puts more emphasis on a good profile picture and quality of the content that you generate. The URL that you use should link to a personal blog or a more extensive profile, such as LinkedIn. Because of Twitter’s popularity, you may need to be creative in your use of initials to get your name. As with email, keep the username related to your name or career if you are going to be using it for professional purposes.

Your Twitter newsfeed is populated with tweets from the people or hashtags that you follow. Note that there is no distinction between following and connecting.
on Twitter, following is the only connection that exists. In addition to hashtags and people, you can follow lists, which are curated groups of profiles related by a theme. You can follow public lists made by others or create your own public or private lists. Lists help you organize the information you receive, allowing you to find what you want more efficiently.

In terms of the content you generate on Twitter, focus is good. If you are interested in a variety of subjects, create multiple accounts, each with a specific goal, so that they stay focused. Provide consistent, valuable information with your tweets, and you may establish yourself as an expert voice on the subject. Retweeting is how you can share the tweets of others with your followers, and you can re-tweet with or without an added comment. Sharing another person’s content by retweeting them is helpful because it exposes them to a new audience (your network) and can potentially generate new connections.

### 11.3.8 Google Scholar Citations

You may already be familiar with Google Scholar, which is Google’s search engine specialized for publications and patents. A Google Scholar Citations account allows you to keep track of your publications by listing all of them in one place, as well as listing your co-authors, and follow the publications of others. In addition, it calculates your h-index, a metric for an author’s productivity and citation impact suggested by Jorge Hirsch in 2005. An author’s h-index is the highest value for which an author has published $h$ number of papers that have been cited at least $h$ times. Relative to LinkedIn and Facebook, a Citations account has few features, and like ResearchGate, its emphasis on publications gives it a more academic focus.

A Google Scholar Citations account is free, but you will need to sign up for a Gmail account to create one. Once you are logged in to your Google account, navigate to scholar.google.com and click on “My Profile,” then follow the setup wizard. You will be asked to identify publications that are yours, but some of the suggestions may be erroneous, so select those that are accurate and that you want listed. There are fields you can fill out to include your affiliation, keywords related to your research, and a URL, which you can link to a personal website, blog, or your profile on another social networking site. There is also the option to include an image of yourself, which again, should be professional and clear. By default, your account will be private, so check your settings and make it public if you want to be findable.

### 11.3.9 Mendeley

Mendeley is a reference software that was purchased by the scientific publisher Elsevier in 2013. The web version includes social media services, as well. Much like LinkedIn, you can fill out your profile with work and research experience, education, publications, and research interest keywords. Features include a newsfeed populated by posts from other users that you follow (there is no distinction between connecting and following), groups based on research interests,
Networking Platforms

11.3.10 Forums

Forums are like public message boards, for which you typically need to register in order to post but can be read without any kind of account or registration. Forums can be useful for addressing highly specific subject areas and questions. Often, if you are researching a very specific question, you will find your answer online not in an article or paper, but in a forum thread. If you register, you can post your own questions, respond to the questions of others, and participate in discussions. Features typically include direct messaging and a minimalist profile that tracks the number of posts you have made. Answering questions in helpful and insightful ways supports others and performs active and passive networking; your answers will be publicly available for all to read long after you originally posted them.

To find a forum, search the topic area and include the word “forum.” Check the forum content to see if it matches with what you are interested in, and if so, register to comment and post. You can read a forum for its content without posting, but you won’t get the networking benefit if you don’t interact with others.

11.3.11 Membership and alumni directories

If you are a member of a professional society or an alumni association, you most likely have access to a member or alumni directory. Log in to the society or association website to find it, and make your profile as complete as possible, including a photograph. Include an elevator pitch that is audience appropriate. If a field is available for it, provide the appropriate URL to link your preferred social media profile. A complete profile like this is a great form of passive networking that makes you more findable. See if any of the other organizations you associate with have directories where you can fill out a profile. These profiles do not require a lot of maintenance, but keep them updated every year or when you change location or employment.

These organizations and associations will often also have periodicals (for which you could write articles) and remote volunteering opportunities. Also look for member and alumni events at home and in other towns when you travel. Career and job services are sometimes available, and even if you aren’t looking for new work, posting your CV (minus your phone number and home address, for your safety) can make you more visible.

11.3.12 Personal websites and blogs

A personal website or blog can raise your visibility, share your professional work and interests, and provide content for your community, consolidated in one place. And it gives you full control over the format and type of content. What you put on your website or blog should be relevant to your aspirational and career goals, and authentic to who you are and what you do.
Many websites offer free blogs and site builders, and if you want a personalized URL (which ideally contains your name or something to do with your work or research), it is generally inexpensive to purchase one. As with all your accounts, if you include an image of yourself, make sure it looks professional. Make sure that the aesthetics of the website are good, and if you’re not sure, use a template and have a friend or colleague look it over. Include information (and links) to any relevant publications or research you have done, including your company website, journal papers, articles, and anything else that is relevant to your goals or personal brand. You can have an “about” page with fun facts if you want. Include appropriate contact information, such as an email address, so that people can contact you, as well as reasons to do so.

11.3.14 Other platforms

While some of the biggest and most professionally relevant digital networking platforms have been discussed, many more exist. The following list includes some other social media platforms and sites that might interest you:

1. **Instagram**: An app for sharing photos and videos with captions that includes a newsfeed populated by people or hashtags that you follow, a minimal profile, and direct messaging. It is like Twitter except for its emphasis on photos and no character limit on posts. Instagram is owned by Facebook.

2. **Periscope**: A video broadcasting/live streaming app that is owned by and can be used within Twitter. It broadcasts live video, tracks the number of viewers, and lets them comment during the feed so that you can respond live to questions.

3. **HootSuite**: A service that helps you manage your existing social media accounts. Free and premium accounts allow you to post updates simultaneously to multiple accounts, schedule posts in advance, and perform analytics across your synced accounts.

4. **Buffer**: A social media management service focused on content publishing that publishes and schedules content for social networks.

5. **TweetDeck**: A Twitter service for managing multiple Twitter accounts side-by-side simultaneously. For a single account, columns display the various tabs available in the Twitter app side-by-side.

6. **Nuzzel**: This service interfaces with your Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn accounts to highlight the most popular stories and topics in your network, among your friends of friends, or across a platform. You can use it to set up a personal, curated newsletter based on this content.

7. **WeChat**: This Chinese app shares many aspects with Twitter and Facebook, in addition to being a digital wallet and more. It is by far the most popular in China and a necessity for doing business there.
Networking Platforms 193

Most of the Chinese population uses it, and it is slated to become China’s electronic ID system. Note that users are required to use their full legal name to register for a WeChat account.

(8) **SlideShare**: This site, owned by LinkedIn, focuses on educating users on a variety of topics in the form of presentations, infographics, and videos. Users can share their knowledge by uploading their own content.

(9) **Zotero**: An open-source, independent reference management software and social media platform that offers groups and forums.

(10) **Pinterest**: A social media site that allows users to create and share “pins” of interesting images and information from the internet. Users collect pins on thematic boards, and features include following other users, as well as following boards and topics.

### 11.4 Search Engine Optimization

Search engine optimization (SEO) typically refers to the optimization of a website’s structure and content to make it more visible in search engine results. Here it refers to making yourself more visible in the results when your name is searched. Rather than optimizing the content on a site, it means optimizing, creating, or removing the content associated with you that exists online.

What happens when you type your name into Google, Yahoo, or Bing? Are you the first search result? How common is your name? How many results are there? Is there another person with your name who appears more prominently? Do they have a bad reputation?

First, consider the accuracy of the results: are the things with your name on them about you? If your name is common, sharing results with other people may be an issue, so you can get creative with your initials or use a middle name instead of a first name, in order to make your name and search results more distinct. If your name is Sofia Maria Fernandez and a lot of other people show up in the results when you search for “Sofia Fernandez,” you could instead use “Sofia M. Fernandez” or “S. Maria Fernandez.” Many journal publications accept pseudonyms and do not require authors to use a legal name, so you have a lot of freedom as to what name you publish under, but whatever you use, strive for consistency.

**Author Anecdote**

My name, “Christina Willis,” is common in the United States, where I reside, and so when I began writing technical publications in graduate school, I decided to exploit the fact that I have two middle names. To make myself distinct from all the other people in the world named Christina Willis, I use “Christina C. C. Willis.” If you search that name on Google, I have the entire first page of results (as of this writing).
Second, consider the nature of the search results. You want the things that people find about you to be positive and consistent with your networking and career strategy. Negative information comes in two forms: accurate and inaccurate. Accurate negative information (whether it is true or not) is negative information about you that appears when your name is searched. If you posted this information yourself, take it down right away. If someone else posted the information, you can ask to have it taken down, but that may not be possible. The other possibility—negative information about another person with your same name—is referred to here as inaccurate negative information. This is where consistently having pictures of yourself on your accounts is helpful; if the negative information has someone else’s face on it, even if it’s the same name, people can determine that it is not about you. Whether it is accurate or inaccurate, the best solution to negative information that cannot be removed is to displace it to the second page of search results by creating positive content that appears higher in the results.

You can do this by creating your own website, making your profile on various social media accounts more prominent, writing articles, and so forth. If you fill out your profiles on the above listed social media sites and make them publicly visible with a relatively unique name, those accounts are likely to dominate the search results. A personal website, articles written by you, and your answers to forum posts (if you include your name) will also appear in searches. As part of your online networking strategy, keep these accounts up to date by logging in and creating some activity every month or so to keep the search results elevated. Again, consistency, not frequency, is key here, so don’t let this habit become a time sink.

If your name is relatively common and you encounter issues with other researchers that possess the same name, an ORCID can help. This is a non-profit organization that assigns unique alphanumeric identifiers for researchers that can be used when submitting publications, applying for grants, or on social media accounts. It addresses the issue of non-uniform name-order conventions across cultures and the fact that names are not unique identifiers.

Search your name regularly, including image and video searches.

Reputation management involves not just the things you say and share but also the things you don’t say or post in public spaces. A kind and professional persona benefits the people you interact with and your career, and it will reduce the amount of time you need to spend improving your search results.

### 11.5 A Special Note on Physical Mail

While physical mail is neither online nor digital, it deserves mention here as a remote form of networking. There is a lot of advice on the topic of sending thank-you notes that is often not practiced within the American STEM community. However, expressing gratitude this way is recommended in the U.S., especially after job interviews. Research shows that recipients appreciate thank-you notes far more than senders anticipate. Post-job-interview notes as follow-ups appear to be a largely American phenomenon, so it may not be necessary in other cultural contexts.
In the U.S., when someone has done you a favor, such as writing a recommendation letter, nominating you for an award, referring you for a job, or you want to make a special impression after a job interview, sending a physical note or letter is appropriate and gives special emphasis to your message. Sending hand-written, physical mail is becoming more uncommon, so it is a way to get yourself noticed, or to stand out from other job applicants. Include a business card in your note so that you are easily identifiable as the sender. Also make a record for yourself of when and to whom you have sent physical mail since it is not easily searchable the way email or other digital forms of contact are, and you may forget when you sent something.

**Exercises**

1. Consider what platforms your peers and colleagues commonly use (or, if you are thinking of a career change, what platforms are popular in that field). Ask if you are not certain, and see if there are active groups on those sites that are pertinent to your research or work topics. Create a list of relevant platforms and prioritize them based on how active and relevant they are to you, and how they match the kind of content you want to generate.

2. Select one or two platforms of the highest priority on the list you created. Create an account, or update your profile, if you already have one. Make sure your picture is recent and professional, and then fill out your profile as completely and relevantly as possible. Find and join one or more groups on subjects that interest you.

3. Go back to the schedule you made in Exercise 4 of Chapter 10, and refine it as necessary with respect to these high-priority platforms. If you are using more than one platform, you can apply different schedules. Your activity doesn’t have to be frequent or extensive, but at least once a month log in, post something of value, repost and like friends’ content, or start or engage in conversations in a group that you joined. Commit a small amount of time consistently to this endeavor, and put reminders on your calendar or in your planner.

4. For all other accounts on your list that are relevant but lower priority, create an account or update your profile, if you already have one. Fill it out as completely as possible, and link it to one or both of your high-priority accounts. Typically, you can enter a URL for a website, and that can be your profile on another platform. Doing this will make you more findable, with a path to the places where you are most active, without spreading your efforts thin over too many platforms. Update these lower-priority accounts occasionally, perhaps every 6 months or when you have a change in employment.
Keep using the account, or accounts, that will be your focus. Make regular use a habit but not a time-consuming one. Consistency is better than intensity. However, if you are struggling to do this regularly, you might be on the wrong platform or trying to produce the wrong content, so try something new. Experiment with your approach until you find what works for you as a consistent investment in your network.

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