

## Building a Network Throughout Your Gaming Career

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"It's a small industry where everyone knows everyone," said every person I've ever known in the gaming business. They aren't wrong though. Coming up on the operations side and spending my most recent years on the vendor side, I've had the opportunity to see how connected we all are on a global level. There's tremendous opportunity to build partnerships and learn from one another but it can be overwhelming to people who are working to connect and build a network. We're an industry where workers are transient and company acquisitions often dictate paths that make it hard to keep track of one another. Global Gaming Expo (G2E) and ICE Totally Gaming are my favorite two weeks of the year because they're like family reunions where we all get together again. Heather Lee, an industry newcomer who has found her calling in gaming, and I collaborated to share our observations on navigating the personal conduits that stretch from company to company.

Amassing a network in a short amount of time is not easy to do but there are a few key practices that can accelerate the process and solidify your space in the industry. Many view LinkedIn as a great tool when they're looking for a job, but social networking platforms in the professional sector provide much more value than that. Not only can you establish introductions, but also share information and keep your finger on the pulse of industry trends. It's not just a theory either, look Heather up on LinkedIn and see. However, just sending an invite and being connected isn't a valid connection, it's the relevant touch and genuine interest that stands out. Gaming has to be your passion and it's recommended you start with a personal message about why you'd like to connect. Don't try to sell someone something right away if that's the area you're in. If you get any response to that effort at all, it's usually an eye roll. Let the individual know who you are and why connecting is relevant to them as well, but be succinct. By coming from a place of contribution and sincerity, LinkedIn is one of our most easily accessed and successful vehicles for getting face time and building rapport. One thing remains paramount: It's not merely about adding to your number, it's about getting plugged in and having common interests. Don't accept invites to connect with people who you don't know or who aren't in your space. Build a feed that's based upon your area of expertise.

Being connected is only the first step in establishing a solid foundation for your network. Take advantage of Casino City's *Gaming Directory* as another tool to map out regions and do research on each market. Full immersion establishes credibility and tirelessly studying the business allows you to speak intelligently on current topics. Conversational content is where the relationship blooms.

A network can be slow to build, but grows exponentially once a reputation for making connections organically is established. Regardless of the point you are at in fostering your own network, never disregard someone because of title or position. Different perspectives on the business lead to better understanding overall and knowing people at all levels allows you to have long lasting relationships that will be cemented over the duration of entire careers.

Caring and interest develops trust that is built only through proof and time. Remaining diplomatic and positive at all times is imperative to building a network. There are myriads of positive movements in our business and being excited about those is natural. Convey that positivity by congratulating people on accomplishments and discussing events they have recently shared. Our skills are best sharpened when we don't divulge proprietary intel but still explore ideas and strategies with one another. Be the person with a thirst for knowledge who also is secure enough to share their own.

As many have seen, it's hard to get out of gaming. That's not because you're trapped but rather because no industry is as appealing. Imagine going from high fives in a craps pit to a quiet cubicle. Casino networks are the epitome of being built outside of professional environments. It's not

impossible to make connections between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. but it's a 24-hour business and some of my best memories and relationships have been established over dinners and evenings spent visiting other casinos. We're all compelled to this business because that's where we thrive; being flexible and making yourself available are keys to that success.

Building a network is an investment but keeping one is never to be set on auto pilot. The difference between establishing a network and maintaining one over the course of years is being consistent and pushing the industry forward. Never become complacent. Read articles and go see friends speak at events. Write articles about where your thoughts are as others are probably facing similar challenges. Take pride in knowing who would be a good fit for an open position and making that introduction. Those with established networks have an obligation to introduce people and develop those who demonstrate enthusiasm and initiative. Be of the belief that more is, actually, merrier. We're also an industry where a lot of us live by how well we performed in the most recent quarter. Things can happen. Acquisitions can happen. They're exciting but can also displace people. The people who remember us most fondly are those we cared about enough to help in times of need.

Appreciate your network whether it's small or spans the globe. Continue to build this industry. We can never be shy nor hesitant as we're a family and, like a distant cousin, please take a moment to reach out and see how your friends are doing.