NETWORKING

WHY IT’S IMPORTANT

Networking is key to your long-term professional success. It’s easier than you think and the benefits are numerous.

The people you meet and work with throughout your career will shape your future job opportunities. Even the people you have little professional connection to – your hairdresser, your neighbor, your dad’s basketball buddy, your sister’s best friend – could be a future link to something great.

The people who know you, your interests, your work and your work history will guide you in many ways. In regards to networking, the people in your circle could hear of a job or project that might be of interest to you. They might be future professional collaborators. They might know, or BE, the person you will work with some day.

WHAT IS NETWORKING ANYWAY?

- Networking is a lifelong endeavor.
- It’s the continuous cultivation of a network of people influential in your life and work.
- It’s connecting to and staying connected with people who share your interests and with whom you have something in common.

HOW TO GO ABOUT IT

- Remember you already have a professional network – your classmates, your instructors, Academy of Art University alumni and anyone you’ve worked with. You share interests and commonalities with these people. Make the most of them.

- Say YES! to opportunities that come your way. Movie nights, group trips and events.

- Get involved: Attend an Industry on Campus event. The Academy of Art hosts companies, artist and designer presentations, industry panels and networking events year round. Keep an eye open for announcements.

- Get involved: Join a club or start one. Many professional organizations have student chapters. You might be a founder of a professional chapter on campus or join the regional chapter where you live.

- Get involved: Attend professional events that bring artists and designers under one roof.

- Create a LinkedIn profile now, as a student or a young professional. Maintain it over time. Join groups. Get endorsements. Follow businesses/topics of interest to you. Share and engage in conversation.

- Get your free membership to the Academy of Art University Alumni Association. Join the LinkedIn group. Attend their events. Volunteer your expertise. Stay in touch.

- Volunteer. Working behind the scenes of an industry event will lend you credibility.
WHAT NETWORKING IS NOT

- It’s not about getting a job now. The reality of networking is that you need to be constantly meeting new people and noting names and contacts so when you’re looking for new opportunities you already have existing connections to contact.

- It’s not about you. Remember when you meet new people, make it about them. People love to talk about themselves and their work. Listen to what they have to say. You might learn something and you’ll certainly make them happy.

- It’s not a short term thing, it’s a lifetime commitment. It’s important to plant seeds all the time so you always have a section of your garden in bloom.

KEYS TO SUCCESS

- Start small. Meet a few people at a time through activities you like. It’s not necessary to commit yourself to meeting 100 people in a given evening.

- Have a prepared speech. It might sound corny, but be prepared to tell someone in three sentences about your work, your strengths, what you’re passionate about.

- Think about and be prepared to talk about your professional goals. Yes, they may change over time, but if you meet someone new and they ask you what you’re interested in professionally have a good answer.

- Be an active participant. Muster the courage to get involved.

- Make yourself visible in the places you’re most likely to meet like-minded professionals. Join relevant clubs and groups.

- Be passionate about the work or industry you’re pursuing. Any hesitation on your end or uncertainty will result in people believing you’re not committed.

- Follow the work of people you genuinely admire. Comment on their blogs, Facebook pages and Twitter. Never frame your comments around you. Always do it as a contribution to their work.

- Be sincere, friendly and nice. Smile and be genuine.

- Reciprocate. Connect the people you know to the people in your network that they would like to know. Remember though, your referrals reflect on you, so only refer people you can truly endorse.

- Follow up and show your gratitude. Email someone to say it was great to meet them. If someone gives you a referral or otherwise makes a connection for you, send them a thank you email or hand written note. This is NOT optional. You can always offer thanks to someone.
THINGS TO REMEMBER ABOUT NETWORKING

- Networking can be thought of as “like meets like”. If you’re at a big design convention, the people in the room with you all have an interest in and passion for design. This could make things a little easier when starting an initial conversation with someone new.

- Choose quality over quantity. Be genuine and authentic in your pursuit of the people you hope to meet.

- Keep an open mind. Networking creates possibilities, and it might not always be what you expect or intend. You might be a fine art painter with dreams of showing in a gallery, but meet a recruiter from Disney who is looking for a background painter for an upcoming project. Consider pursuing a relationship such as this; you could learn something or meet someone along this path who could play an important role in your future.

- You have your experiences. They are what they are, for better or worse. It’s up to you to make those experience speak the BEST of you and to own your own future.

- Be an active participant. Whenever you can make a contribution in the classroom, at an event, as an intern, or being active within your online communities, strive to make a meaningful contribution.

- Consider your unpaid internship an opportunity to network in addition to gaining experience. Be remembered for the right reasons and take the time to meet other professionals in your industry.

- Be persistent with connecting but do not be overly aggressive. Use good judgment and consider the audience. Constant emailing or attempts to connect can rub people the wrong way.

- Resist the urge to open a conversation with a business card exchange. Take the time to talk and connect with someone before asking for their card or offering yours. Remember that networking is about making real connections and not just trying to get the most email addresses.

- Consider taking notes about your conversations with people you meet in a professional environment. When you contact them in the future, you will have context from your previous encounter to draw from and remind them of your connections.

- When you have the opportunity to network, seize it! Be engaged and open. Know your own limits and if you are not going to participate or bring anything to the table, consider not attending the event.

- It’s never too late to begin again. Maybe you traveled around the world for 6 months, or had to prioritize personal commitments over professional ones. Pick yourself up wherever you may be, reconnect with those who know you and your work and get back in the game.
THE ART OF SELF-PROMOTION

WHY IT’S IMPORTANT

Great work may speak for itself, but only if you tell people to listen. Self-promotion is crucial to your success. There is so much to pay attention to that without publicizing the existence of your art, people won’t know to support it.

WHAT IS SELF-PROMOTION?

- Self-promotion is a lifelong endeavor.
- It is the continuous cultivation of interest and awareness of your work.
- It is nurturing relationships with people who share your passions.

WHAT SELF-PROMOTION IS NOT

Endlessly talking about how great you are. Instead, self-promotion is seeking and creating opportunities to engage with people who may love your work and appreciate your expertise.

YOUR PROFESSIONAL INTRODUCTION

You need to be able to introduce your professional self to anyone in 3 sentences. Be able to specify what type of art or design you do, what your strengths are, and what you’re passionate about. Be as specific as possible. For example:

“I am a BFA candidate in interior architecture and design. I love making small residential spaces as ergonomic and sustainable as possible. I draw a lot of inspiration from color and nonlinear forms.”

“I’m a concept artist who interned for Riot Games last spring. I love being able to design photorealistic environments and will graduate with my MFA from Academy of Art University next May.”

HOW TO BRAND YOURSELF

Your brand is your professional identity—what you want someone to know about you. It combines your:

- Talents/Skills
- Beliefs/Values
- Interests/Passions
- Philosophy

Your brand should reflect your personality. It should be a consistent, accurate representation of who you are and what you’re about.
To find out what your personal brand is, ask yourself:

- What are my biggest strengths?
- Where are my passions?
- What makes me unique?

Develop a slogan that properly captures your brand. Use it in social media and all of your professional interactions.

**HOW TO GO ABOUT PROMOTING YOUR BRAND**

- **Learn and use social media.** 75% of HR departments are required to Google applicants and all of us tend to look online for information. Make sure you have a positive web presence that demonstrates your skills and qualifications. Ideally, the first result should be your online portfolio or personal website so people can view your art.

- **Engage with people in your city and field.** Do this both online and in person. Demonstrate your value and offer tips and support to fellow artists. Grow your community as you move through—and graduate from—AAU.

- **Actually try and make friends!** This is especially important once you’re out of school. These are the people who will help promote your work and show up at events.

- **Never leave home without your business cards.** This is another important way for people to get a hold of you. Leave them with event organizers.

- **Sign up for event mailing lists.** This is an easy way to stay informed about what’s happening in your field, and to interact with and grow your network.

**WHAT TYPE OF SOCIAL MEDIA SHOULD YOU USE?**

Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, Tumblr…the social media options are endless. Whatever works for you is what you should use. To help you choose, consider:

- The social media platform that is most relevant to the type of art you do. Something image-based like Instagram or Pinterest might make the most sense for visual artists, for instance.

- The amount of time it takes to maintain all of your social media platforms. Consider that:
Use HootSuite or TweetDeck to schedule your posts in advance and blast all your social media channels at once.

- The type of social media interaction that is most enjoyable and interesting to you. If you're having fun, you're more likely to maintain it!

KEYS TOSUCCESS

- Make sure your website and social media link directly to where people can purchase your work.

- Stay up to date on what's happening in your industry. Sign up for mailing lists, Google Alerts, and RSS feeds related to what you do.

- Think of yourself as a business. Who might be interested in what you do? Market yourself to those groups.

- Comment on other people’s blogs and art. If you see something you love, drop the artist a line and let them know! Fostering these types of relationships can go a long way in terms of building a network. Be genuine and help people out.

- Converse. Actually start and be part of conversations! Don’t be the self-important person who drones on and on about his or her own work. See what people are up to, and offer what you know about a topic.
• Pay it forward. We remember the people who tip us off to a cool gallery or an amazing artist. That will generate more loyalty than anything else.

• Social media is constantly evolving, and what works for you may change. Don’t be afraid to experiment!

• Use analytics to help focus your efforts and determine where you’re having the most success.