



# Net, working?

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I began my career laboriously completing manual statutory registers in green 'company kits' and can well recall my wonder – and relief – when I first saw a software package designed to maintain those registers electronically.

Indeed, managing without e-mail and the internet, not to mention the numerous ingenious software solutions we all rely upon, is now unthinkable. Perhaps I am naturally lazy (I prefer to call it efficient) but I have always been drawn towards labour-saving devices. There are so many ways in which technology now helps us in the workplace and I for one embrace that technology with great enthusiasm.

One internet development which I had not hitherto taken advantage of, however, was professional networking sites. The time-saving potential offered by such sites seems almost too good to be true. While face-to-face meetings and networking events are undoubtedly valuable, the unproductive hours spent trekking to and from them can seem a waste of precious time – and almost an unaffordable luxury on occasion.

But like most of us, the number of urgent issues on my 'to do' list often means that getting round to lower priority tasks can take some time. Joining a professional networking website had, unfortunately for me, fallen into that lower priority category and for some time my intentions had failed to be translated into action. Part of the reason for this inertia was perhaps that I secretly feared it would take me several hours to set up.

At long last, prompted by the reminder in this magazine in February to join *Chartered Secretary's* LinkedIn group, I finally took the plunge – and I was pleasantly surprised to find that my qualms about the difficulties of getting myself established on LinkedIn were wholly unfounded. Within a few minutes, I was registered and my profile was set up. Sending out invites from my e-mail contacts was a piece of cake and, most importantly, my contacts were kind enough to accept the invites I had sent them. Spurred on by this initial success, I quickly signed myself up to a handful of helpful-looking groups – including of course the *Chartered Secretary* and *ICSA* groups.

But, having successfully established myself as a brand new member of the LinkedIn community, I'm sorry to say I sat back and waited. I'm not sure what I expected to happen but I quickly

learned that, just like networking in person, when networking online you can only expect to get out what you are prepared to put in. A willingness to play your part by sharing information and responding to discussions started by others is a must. The vitality of any networking group, whether online or not, naturally depends on the contributions of the individuals within its membership. Signing up and sitting back is not enough. That said, being an active member does not require you to devote vast amounts of time, and although my own experience initially left me feeling a little disappointed, my instinct that,

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internet networking offers a real possibility to build up a valuable pool of useful contacts if used proactively is starting to be proved true.

Inevitably, the practical matters we tackle or the changes to regulation or legislation we grapple with are common to many of us. Similarly, the difficulties which we come across in our professional lives are rarely unique. Yet sometimes the life of the company secretary can feel a little isolated, with many Chartered Secretaries being the sole source of company law and corporate governance expertise within their organisation. Sharing knowledge, best practice, opinions, experiences, ideas and fresh approaches to tricky issues is nothing new – we have been supporting each other through traditional networking for years. The advantage of doing it online, however, is the ease with which a vast breadth of understanding can be drawn upon and the speed with which questions can be raised and responses provided.

There is no doubt online networking is more sterile than interacting with people face-to-face and is no substitute for the lasting impression you get from meeting someone in person. But it is unquestionably a handy facility for sharing views and insights: to that extent I consider it a welcome addition to the box of professional tools that I use to a greater or lesser extent in my day-to-day work.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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