When you think of networking, do you think of only in-person events? Don't! Don't limit yourself to finding collaborators who are only in your immediate geographic space. Most networking occurs virtually- by leveraging strategic social media resources to find individuals with whom you can potentially collaborate, both formally and informally. My favorite site to do this is LinkedIn, which (at least currently) is THE professional marketplace. It is a place to be seen and to find people to build effective, long-term, win-win alliances. In fact, LinkedIn is specifically is designed for this type of networking and has various features that enable you to very successfully locate the right people with whom you can start conversations. Its algorithm even suggests people who might be a good match for you. But you don't have to just rely on a bot to boost your networking game. Here are 5 Tips to find people with whom to network on LinkedIn:

1 "Search".

It seems almost too easy, but Search is a great way to find people, especially if you are looking for folks in certain organizations, fields, and teams. I have found Search to be really helpful when I am trying to locate individuals who have an unusual combination of skills or background fields. For example, if I was interested in finding someone who had a materials science degree and worked in data science, I could search for those parameters. Another example: let's say I wanted to find a person who was a materials engineer and worked for Company X, doing Y tasks. I could search for those elements and would be presented with a menu of individuals who have these key words in their profiles. LinkedIn Search is a much more granular action than on Google because it essentially looks through peoples' resumes. I have done tests where I search on LinkedIn and on Google for the same parameters and end up with better results on LinkedIn.

2 Groups.

There are thousands of Groups you can join on LinkedIn and each one serves as a way to connect its members to others. The MRS Group is a perfect example. It currently has over 14,000 members worldwide. If you visit this Group on LinkedIn, you immediately can see that the Group Owner and Manager work for MRS, and as a member of the Group, you can view postings made by other Group members and even look through the membership directory. Groups are fantastic for networking because they are self-aggregations of like-minded people. Peruse the Groups and you are bound to find kindred spirits!

3 "See Alumni".

This feature is incredibly powerful in the insights it provides regarding where fellow alumni of a specific institution have gone for their career. There are 6 parameters you can search, including where they are in the world, what organization they work for, what they studied, what they do, what they are skilled at, and their degree of connection from you. To "See Alumni", visit the official page of the university you wish to search. You will see a blue button that states "See Alumni" on that page. And then go wild in your examination. Do searches based on years that alumni graduated or attended the institution, look for people in certain organizations or in certain parts of the world, and gain insight into where those who studied materials science and engineering work today. This is a very useful tool, and highly underutilized by the scientific community!

4 Company pages.

Most major organizations – universities, companies, and even government agencies and labs – have their own official page on LinkedIn. And each page is chock-a-block full of tons of useful information about the organization, including jobs that are advertised, background on the company, and even a stock snapshot. The page's real value is that it can connect you with any of its employees who have a LinkedIn profile. Take 3M for instance. If you visit the 3M page on LinkedIn, you will see how many of your own LinkedIn Connections are 3M employees and you will also get a chance to search the over 61,000 3M employees globally who are on LinkedIn. This is a great way to network with people in a specific organization.

5 Your Connections' Connections.

Once you and I are connected on LinkedIn, you have the chance to look through my Connections. Take advantage of this amazing resource! If you find one of my Connections intriguing, you can even ask me to introduce you- LinkedIn has a specific mechanism for this purpose.

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