

The Main Principles and Benefits of Online Networking

By now, most people are familiar with the idea of "six degrees of separation". The 1993 film, which starred Will Smith, brought the idea to the general public by using it as the title and main topic of the plot. The idea became more popular through the "Kevin Bacon game", whereby you pick any actor or actress and try to link them, in some way, to the actor Kevin Bacon within "six steps". Entertaining and seemingly frivolous though they are, these popularizing vehicles were based upon a serious academic concept of social interaction and human networks which had been around since the early 1990s. The concept, as in the Kevin Bacon game, is that due to the technological advances in communications and transport, human beings are becoming ever more connected. Great distances have less effect upon communication and, therefore, human networks were expanding well beyond previous limits and barriers. The modern world is shrinking. Social networks are at the heart of the Kevin Bacon game, and the six degrees of separation concept. A social network is, essentially, a series of connections between individuals or groups of individuals or organizations. One person or group may have many different networks, for example, one person may have a family network, an old school network, a network of friends, a golf playing network, and many others. An organization may have an employee network, a supplier network, a client network, etc. Each of these networks is characterized by the type of relationship, or interaction, which connected it. A network of employees might be characterized by an employer, a network of golfers by those who play or are interested in golf. Networks start at the family and go right up to the level of nations. They are the "glue" of societies, and are at the basis of all cultures. While we probably each recognize that we are all a part of a network, or variety of networks, we don't necessarily think of them as anything more than the people we know in various capacities. Of course, the sorts of networks we are a part of are usually reflective of our domestic lives, our hobbies, our work life, our interests, and so the network itself isn't such a feature as the people that represent it for us. But it is interesting to consider, for a moment, these networks as structures. If you were to write down the names of all the people you knew, and placed them each in lists corresponding to how you came to know them through family, golf, school, etc. then you would be close to creating a structural map of your networks. If each of the people in one of your lists then did the same, you could compare lists and then see the true extent of the network. You may only know five golfers, but each of them know five more, and so on. Your recommendation of a particular club could cross national boundaries based upon the advice given to a friend, which got passed on, and passed on. In analyzing social networks, greater emphasis is given to those individual people, or groups, who not only have more connections within the specific network, but also are members of more networks. If you and all your golfer friends live in an isolated town where you only play golf and work and go home then your network will be restricted in its effectiveness and would be considered to be a "small and tight" network. Knowledge and opportunities in such networks goes no further than the individuals involved. New and fresh members are less likely to join, the network is less likely to expand or stimulate its members any further once the existing knowledge and opportunities have been shared. If, on the other hand, each member of a network is also a member of many other networks then it is "more open" network and will expand and allow a greater circulation of fresh opportunities and wider access to new information. The flow of knowledge and information in such a network is far greater and beneficial to its members. If we now apply these ideas to online networking, it should be immediately clear just how useful and beneficial the heightened communication possibilities of a worldwide web of networks would be. Since knowledge and opportunities may be seen as part of the valued currency of a network, then a worldwide platform must be a superior form. With online social network services specializing in this very aspect of networking the ability to join huge, and potentially greatly beneficial, networks is "supercharged".

About the Author

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