



## Link Greater Green Bay continues to expand

When I talked to Stacie Hackl in early 2009, she and her husband, Mark, were just starting to use LinkedIn.

They thought the social media network for business would be a good way to expand their networking activities. Then, to make it more beneficial locally, they formed Link Greater Green Bay. The growth of the group has been explosive, and today it boasts 2,600 members.

Stacie Hackl, who oversees the group, has built it with a blend of online and personal contacts. As an avid networker, she thinks that this combination is most effective.

"Online and face-to-face marketing go hand in hand," Hackl said. "Online is a tool that you can use to find people and stay connected, but you need face to face. You can connect with a thousand people, but unless you build a relationship of trust, it's not going to go anywhere."

Online makes it easier to gain access, stay in touch, follow up and keep the relationship going. It allows professionals to establish themselves as experts in their fields and build top-of-mind awareness. A newer program, Intro duceMe360.com, takes it a step further by connecting professionals with video introductions.

"It is like a match.com for business people," Hackl said. "Members join and build a profile and tell me what categories of professionals they want to meet. Twice a week, I match them with others and send them a video. It takes the work out of networking; I do the searching, finding, and connecting for them."

The program has resulted in numerous success stories. One member formed a relationship that will provide her business with enough income to support her business for a year. Others report finding jobs or employees. As with LinkedIn, greater success comes by developing a strong profile.

Hackl stresses the importance of a profile and video.

"Go 110 percent or don't go at all," she said. "Your profile needs to be complete and professional. You wouldn't go to an interview in a sweat suit or after just rolling out of bed. Consider your online impact as just as important."

A professional photo is crucial, and Hackl occasionally offers head shots at Link Greater Green Bay meetings, usually held monthly. The meetings have also grown in attendance, and the most recent meeting set a new record. To make the meetings more valuable, Hackl posts a list of attendees online so that there is time to plan connections before arriving. Each meeting includes networking, a short meeting, a sponsor introduction, and a speaker. Most topics are related to the use of social media.

Hackl spends hours coordinating the group, starting discussions, planning meetings, and making matches on IntroduceMe 360. She considers it her way of giving back, and sees her insurance business growing because of it.

"Instead of traditional marketing, advertising, and cold calling, I think of this as my way to stay top of mind. It is being out there in the community and being seen as someone who's out there and helping," she said.

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