



FEATURE ARTICLE II  
Nick Walters, Park Ridge Country Club

# Professional Social Networking

*The way we communicate today is different from how we communicated in the past. Instead of snail mail and telegrams, we send emails and make phone calls. Want to leave somebody a short message on a post-it note? No need, just send them a text message. Not only have some methods of communication been replaced by others, but there are new ways of sending your message to individuals and groups. One of these additional methods is online social networking.*

Social networking is what happens when people with a common interest interact for personal or professional gain. There are myriads of websites designed for these connections, but Facebook and LinkedIn are among the most popular.

Sites like these can be useful in our personal and professional lives, and, the best part is, they can be fun. For most of us, however, the initial thought of joining an online community might not be that appealing. We may ask, "What's wrong with a phone call or email?"

There is nothing wrong with a phone call, email, text message, or personal conversation. In fact, let's take a second to dissect that last sentence. A phone call, an email, and a text message are all examples of how communication has evolved. The common link in this evolution is technology. Newer methods of communicating are not necessarily better than those of the past, but certain situations may call for different ways to touch base. There are definite technological gaps between generations. Whether we like it or not, we need to follow the trends to keep these gaps from widening.

Just like the telephone and email, social networking sites have begun to change the way people interact. Professionally, these online communities can provide a valuable way for individuals to promote their talents and for associations and companies to share and update information.

Showcasing our talents can be difficult, but the more outlets we have to promote them, the more likely someone will notice us. The same goes for companies and associations. The MAGCS groups on Facebook and LinkedIn not only provide information to get to the MAGCS website, but the groups also serve as a place to contact other members, discuss industry topics, or learn details about future MAGCS events. Through member profiles, we can keep colleagues updated on personal and professional endeavors, such as current projects or career moves.

LinkedIn prides itself on being the professional side of the social networking scale, and is focused on connecting one person or group to another via mutual connections. This can be useful in a number of different circumstances.

For instance, rumor has it that a local golf course is looking for a new superintendent, and you would like to find some information about that. LinkedIn will show you the contacts you share at that course. Not only that, it will show you contacts **of your** contacts that have connections with that golf course. Now all you have to do is get a hold of the mutual contacts via their respective LinkedIn pages.

In another example, I am a member of the MAGCS group on LinkedIn, which means I am connected to the other members of the MAGCS group. Let's say I need some information about a new fairway mower but don't know who to contact. LinkedIn allows me to see what vendors are a part of my network or a colleague's network. Now I know who to call or email.

Facebook is a bit more liberal and claims its mission is, "To give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected." Facebook users are able to keep in contact with friends, family and colleagues, as well as share photos, videos, and other information.

With the built in security settings of Facebook, users pick and choose who can view portions of their profile, thus allowing them to keep their private lives separate from their professional lives. For example, a user creates a vacation photo album on Facebook. This album contains some photos that border on unprofessional, but friends would enjoy them. The user can adjust the privacy settings and identify who can see them.

On the professional side, the MAGCS Facebook page offers members a discussion board as well as a current list of association events. Also, depending on the privacy settings of an individual's profile page, members can view and interact with colleagues via their own Facebook pages.

This is a summary of the basic functions available. If you belong to an online community, or would like to explore further possibilities of social networking, join the MAGCS groups on Facebook and LinkedIn. If you find that it's not for you, you can delete your profile at any time. **-OC**