



Finnish Institute of  
Occupational Health

# NETWORKS

## – PROVIDING SUPPORT FOR ENTREPRENEURS

Leverage from  
the EU  
2014–2020



Centre for Economic Development,  
Transport and the Environment

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## Background and purpose of this guidebook

This guidebook is intended for entrepreneurs wishing to expand their social networks. We have written the guidebook with both Finnish and foreign-born entrepreneurs in mind.

Networking is useful in terms of expanding and developing business operations and supporting the well-being of the entrepreneur. Many entrepreneurs have also found that networks help beat loneliness.

However, networking takes time and effort. This is why entrepreneurs may find it challenging. This guidebook offers ideas and practical tips for networking. It shows you how to find new partners, what networking requires, and how various networks support the well-being of entrepreneurs.

This guidebook was produced in the European Social Fund project Promoting the well-being of micro entrepreneurs through networking (2015–2017), a joint project of the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health, the Federation of Helsinki Parishes, and NewCo Helsinki. Our aim is to promote the networking and well-being of entrepreneurs. Topics of other guidebooks produced as part of the project include support for combining work and private life, and time management. There is also a guidebook on occupational health services.

We would like to thank all the entrepreneurs that we have had the pleasure to meet in our workshops and at other events. You have given us great ideas and insights for the content of this guidebook! We would like to extend special thanks to two entrepreneurs: Verena Rentrop for valuable descriptions of her own experiences of networking, and Yusuf Mohamad for tips on networking, and valuable feedback on the guide during the writing phase.

Helsinki, 4 September 2017

Auli Airila and Barbara Bergbom

# Networks – vital for entrepreneurs

Networks are vitally important for entrepreneurs. They help entrepreneurs find new partners and reach new customers. Networking with other entrepreneurs can be extremely useful. A fellow entrepreneur can share your thoughts and worries in a manner that people who are not entrepreneurs might struggle to understand. Networking is good for your business and your well-being!

**A NETWORK** refers to a group of people or organisations and their relationships. A network is based on cooperation that is mutually beneficial to all participants.

Networks are becoming more and more important in business operations. This is why you should invest in creating and maintaining a solid and effective network.

Networks do not create themselves; it takes time to create and develop them. Networking is worth it, though: the benefits outweigh the effort!

## Benefits of networking

Entrepreneurs benefit from networks in many ways. Networks enable you to

- create new business opportunities
- increase your sales and make your operations more efficient
- solve business problems
- expand your customer base and markets
- cut down costs
- generate new ideas and insights
- benefit from the skills of others
- find support for promoting your well-being
- make it easier to combine work and your private life.

Networks can also generate financial benefits. For example, you may be able to negotiate better supply contracts together with other entrepreneurs. Networking will also help you in marketing: by marketing yourself and your business, you will find new customers and increase your sales. Peer support from other entrepreneurs and sharing experiences can prove very useful. You might hear ideas that you would never have thought of. You could find a fellow entrepreneur nearby, who might be able to give you a hand if you fall ill.

**FOOD FOR THOUGHT:** *What do you expect from networks? What benefits have you been unable to find through your current networks? Would you be prepared to expand your networks to gain these benefits?*



## Networks for various purposes

Networks can be very different. Some networks are based on promoting your business, while others may promote your well-being. Some networks focus on bilateral relationships; others connect you with several people or organisations.

Networks may enable you to

- increase your understanding of entrepreneurship and factors affecting your well-being
- cooperate in developing new products and services
- improve your skills in business, marketing, and financing
- offer your skills to others
- find recreational activities and get away from work.

**FOOD FOR THOUGHT:** *What kind of networks and social relationships do you need? Do you need support in developing your business skills? Would you like peer support for business or your well-being? Would you like to make friends with other entrepreneurs? What kind of networks might you need in the future?*



## What does networking require?

Common rules are required to make networks work well. Networks are based on

- common goals
- trust
- commitment
- reciprocity.



IMAGE 1. Key principles of an effective network.

**Shared goal and objective.** A network must have a shared goal and objective. Each member must benefit from a network or be able to generate added value for their operations.

**Trust.** A network is based on trust. It is built together through discussion and agreement on common rules. It is important to learn to know the members of a network and understand their operations and goals.

Clear rules should be drawn up for a network at the beginning of cooperation: a list of the rights and obligations of the members, how the work

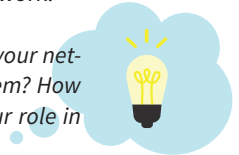


will be shared, and the type of contracts required. Honesty and openness build trust. It is also important that you are worth the trust.

**Commitment.** Networking requires commitment to cooperation and interaction. Commitment also helps in creating long-term partnerships. Then again, there are also loose networks that do not require constant commitment and time.

**Reciprocity.** A network is based on reciprocity. In a network, you receive from and give to others. You must be prepared to share your skills and willing to accept the views and knowledge of the other members of the network.

**FOOD FOR THOUGHT:** *Are you clear on the goals and objectives of your networks? Do the other members understand the rules and follow them? How could you commit more to your key networks? How do you see your role in your networks?*



## Tips on how to start networking

### **Define your operations.**

What is the core of your business? What are your current and future customers like? You can make a draft of your network by drawing a picture of your current networks (see Appendix Your Networking Map).

**Think about the operations and operating environment of your business.** Which companies and people are linked to the goals and operations of your business? Which factors link different operators to you and your business?

**Define the benefits of networking for you.** What type of networks would promote your well-being? How could other people or companies support your business operations?

**Think about the companies and people you could contact.** And think about the type of cooperation that you would like to develop.

**Identify potential meeting places (such as entrepreneur organisations, trade fairs, events, seminars, electronic**

### **communication channels).**

How can you find new contacts? Will you be able to draw on your existing friends or acquaintances in order to expand your network?

### **Prepare a networking plan.**

Set yourself networking goals. And monitor how you achieve your goals. Find material to support your networking. Use business cards, your business website, and brochures to make yourself and your business more convincing. Contact people and start networking!

## More efficient networking

It takes time to build and expand your network. It is important to think about why you are expanding your network. Are you looking for cooperation to support your business operations, or for new customers or markets? Or are you looking for peer support and help from other entrepreneurs to improve your well-being?

Planning and initiative are key to networking. Go out and approach other people or interesting organisations. Introduce yourself and show that you are genuinely interested in them and their operations.



**Be genuinely interested in other people.** Encourage others to talk about themselves. Be careful not to offer your ideas too eagerly. It is important not to approach people when you are angry or in an arrogant state of mind. Try not to make others think that you consider yourself more important than them.

**Learn the names of people.** This will be extremely useful when networking. People like it when you remember their names correctly.

### How to meet people

**Be a good listener.** It is important to listen to others, as we all like to be heard. It is no coincidence that we have two ears and only one mouth. Listening to others enables you to help them. It also allows you to learn things that benefit you and your business.

**Pay attention to the needs of the people you talk to.** Don't be selfish; focus on the interests of the person you are talking to.

**Make them feel important.** We all appreciate the feeling of being valued. Making others feel valued is important in business and in life in general. But remember to be genuine and sincere; don't fake your interest or flattery. This will also help you as an entrepreneur!

*Tips provided by entrepreneur Yusuf Mohamud, Sinun Sanomasi Marketing.*



# Various networks of entrepreneurs

As an entrepreneur, you are likely to be a member of several networks. Some of the networks probably provide direct support for your business operations while others consist of informal encounters that promote your well-being or skills. As an entrepreneur, you need various networks – structured and loose, formal and informal.

Sometimes it can be challenging to participate in several networks at the same time. This is why it is important to decide which your core networks are. Which networks are worth your time? Which networks are worth the effort? Which networks do you consider less important?



IMAGE 2. Various networks of entrepreneurs.

## Core business networks

Your core business networks may comprise

- networks between companies
- suppliers
- subcontractors
- customers.

Bilateral partnerships with other entrepreneurs in the same field or in the same area are often important to sole traders and micro entrepreneurs. You can work with other entrepreneurs in your area to organise shared customer events, to market each other's products or services, and to arrange informal get-togethers, such as lunch dates or special evenings. Be active and contact entrepreneurs in your area – pop in the shop next door and say hello! Cooperation will enable you to build a social network that can prove useful when you need someone to stand in for a moment or when you need help with combining work and your private life.

Micro entrepreneurs can also network with large companies. Large companies benefit from the agility of small businesses. And for micro entrepreneurs, large companies can provide vital contacts and new customers, and they can help come up with new operating models or distribution channels for their products.

Entrepreneur organisations can also provide opportunities for networking with other entrepreneurs. For example, their events can be great for meeting other entrepreneurs.

**Finnish Enterprise Agencies** provide specific support for new entrepreneurs. They offer training and individual guidance, among other things. Their services are available in several languages. For example, NewCo Helsinki provides services in Finnish, Swedish, English, Estonian, Russian, Arabic, Italian, and Chinese. [www.uusyrityskeskus.fi/in-english](http://www.uusyrityskeskus.fi/in-english) and [www.newcohelsinki.fi/en](http://www.newcohelsinki.fi/en)

**The Federation of Finnish Enterprises, with its regional organisations,** offers entrepreneurs guidance and training and organises events and opportunities for networking. They offer individual guidance on funding, developing business operations, and legal matters, among other things. The entrepreneur organisation can also support you in promoting your

well-being. This may involve financial support for recreation or a holiday. You may also receive discounts on fuel and insurance, communication, IT and marketing services. [www.yrittajat.fi/en](http://www.yrittajat.fi/en)

**Business Mentors Finland** also offers support for entrepreneurs. With a Business Mentor, an entrepreneur can discuss the development of their business operations, find new ideas and solutions to problems, and expand their networks. Their activities are free of charge. [www.yrityskummit.fi](http://www.yrityskummit.fi)

## Networks that support your well-being

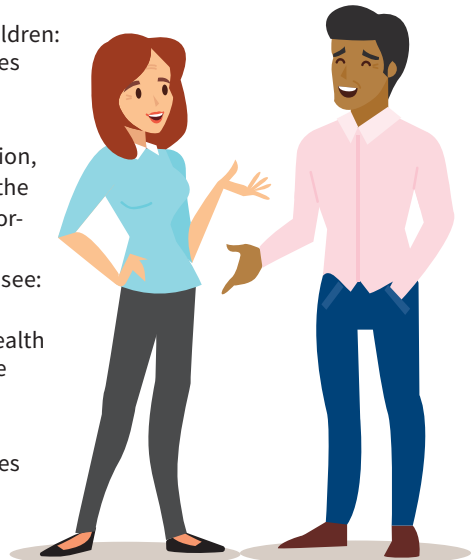
The above networks and entrepreneur organisations can help you with developing your business operations. As an entrepreneur, you should also have networks and partners that support your well-being and help you cope.

Your network for supporting your well-being may include some of the following:

- Your spouse, family, and relatives, whether near or far
- Friends, acquaintances, and neighbours
- Leisure-time networks (organisations, societies, and volunteer work, etc.)
- Contacts developed through your children: day-care centre, clubs, school, hobbies
- Other entrepreneurs

Many organisations also offer information, advice, and counselling to promote the well-being of entrepreneurs. These organisations include:

- Occupational health services (please see: [www.ttl.fi](http://www.ttl.fi) and [www.ttl.fi/en](http://www.ttl.fi/en))
- The Finnish Association for Mental Health and their development project for the well-being of entrepreneurs ([www.mielenterveysseura.fi/en](http://www.mielenterveysseura.fi/en))
- The well-being network for workplaces ([www.ttl.fi/tyhyverkosto](http://www.ttl.fi/tyhyverkosto))
- The church (e.g., [notes.evl.fi](http://notes.evl.fi) / [EVLen.nsf](http://EVLen.nsf) and [ort.fi/en](http://ort.fi/en))



You should also keep in mind various **virtual networks**. These networks include open and closed groups on Facebook ([www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)) and LinkedIn ([www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com)). Twitter ([www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com)) can also prove a good networking tool for entrepreneurs.



**FOOD FOR THOUGHT:** Which of your networks work well? Could you use help in an area such as networks for supporting your well-being, funding, or business management?



## Tips for expanding social networks

### **Make use of all contacts.**

Tell your friends and family about your needs – they may be able to help you with networking. If you are a part-time entrepreneur, remember to utilise your existing work networks. Don't forget networks from your earlier career.

### **Remember the so-called second hand networks.**

Remember that your network is a link to wider networks. Members of your network can introduce you to their networks, enabling you to expand your own network!

**Be active.** Keep an open mind and seek new contacts and partners. Talk to people at events and get-togethers. Remember that you can also start a new network with local entrepreneurs, for example.

**Meet new people and see new places.** Interacting with people who work in areas different from yours will give you new ideas. Take a look at communal work facilities, i.e. facilities that people can use to do their own work. In the Helsinki area, providers of communal work facilities include NewCo Helsinki, Hel-

sinki Entrepreneurs, Microsoft Flux, UMA (Technopolis), and Mothership of Work.

### **Make time for networking.**

Networking requires time, effort, and interest.

**Find a balance.** Think carefully about how much time you want to use for networking. It is also important to make time for yourself and promoting your well-being.

## Other partners for entrepreneurs

### Authorities and other bodies

#### **Finnish Enterprise Agencies**

provide specific support for new entrepreneurs.

[www.uusyrityskeskukset.fi/in-english](http://www.uusyrityskeskukset.fi/in-english)

**ELY Centres** provide advice with issues related to funding and development.

[www.ely-keskus.fi/en](http://www.ely-keskus.fi/en)

**TE Offices** organise events and provide information for new entrepreneurs. New full-time entrepreneurs may also be eligible for a start-up grant.

[www.te-palvelut.fi/te/en](http://www.te-palvelut.fi/te/en)

**Enterprise Finland** is a comprehensive online service offering services and information on entrepreneurship.

[www.yrityssuomi.fi/en](http://www.yrityssuomi.fi/en)

**The Tax Administration** website offers information for entrepreneurs on taxation and business obligations. Their website contains information on different company forms at various stages of the business life cycle.

[www.vero.fi/en](http://www.vero.fi/en)

**Kela** is your partner in personal matters (sickness, incapacity for work, family allowances, rehabilitation, occupational health

care, unemployment, pension, insurance, income support) and similar matters related to your employees. [www.kela.fi/web/en](http://www.kela.fi/web/en)

**Training providers.** Various training providers, such as vocational institutions, universities of applied sciences, universities and specialised colleges organise training for aspiring entrepreneurs. The training can vary from short courses to degree programmes. Entrepreneur training is also offered as labour market training. [www.studyinfo.fi](http://www.studyinfo.fi)

### Partners for funding

**Tekes:** [www.tekes.fi/en](http://www.tekes.fi/en)

**Finnvera:** [www.finnvera.fi/eng](http://www.finnvera.fi/eng)

**EU funding:**

[www.structuralfunds.fi](http://www.structuralfunds.fi)

**Team Finland Network:**

[team.finland.fi/en](http://team.finland.fi/en)

**Foundation for Finnish Inventions:** [www.keksintosaatio.fi](http://www.keksintosaatio.fi)

**Guarantee Foundation:**  
[www.takuusaatio.fi/en](http://www.takuusaatio.fi/en)

### Networks that promote internationalisation

**Finpro:**

[www.finpro.fi/web/finpro-eng](http://www.finpro.fi/web/finpro-eng)

**Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment (MEAE):**

[www.tem.fi/en](http://www.tem.fi/en)

**Finnpartnership:**

[www.finnpartnership.fi/www/en](http://www.finnpartnership.fi/www/en)

# Online communication as a networking tool

As an entrepreneur, you should also focus on online communication. Online communication is inexpensive, and it can reach vast numbers of people and businesses. Online communication is perfect for the exchange of information and discussions. It is also a good tool for marketing your products and events, managing your customer relationships, and communicating between business partners.



## Tips for online communication

### **Use online communication in your business marketing.**

Share links to your products and services online and on social media. But remember not to bombard your audience with your information (“spamming”). Show interest in others too.

**Network with your customers and business partners on various social media platforms.** You can network on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, or on your website. You can also write a blog.

### **Follow and participate actively.**

Remember that online activities are based on interaction and the exchange of ideas.

### **Be open about learning something new.**

Learn to use digital media. Entrepreneur organisations provide guidance on managing and utilising digital media for your business operations.





## Notes

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## How to network

*Verena Rentrop is a sole trader in her company Chocolate Angel. Her business idea is to bring positive energy to a workplace through personal encounters. She also works as a photographer in her company Rencher. Here, she talks about the significance of networks in her work.*

### **Facebook, LinkedIn, blog...**

I am a member of a number of networks. As a photographer, I have spent years building contacts with other photographers. I am active on social media. I participate in discussions, exchange ideas, and give and receive feedback. I worked for Nokia for 18 years. Then I started a closed Facebook group for ex-Nokia employees. Today, the group has more than 27,000 members worldwide. We have also created a blog, NokiaPeople.com, for people to share their Nokia stories. I am a member of several other Facebook groups. I also use LinkedIn.

### **Support, information, new ideas**

My networks give me information, support, and new ideas. They also give me a lot of energy. However, my aim is never to take advantage of my networks – on the contrary, my priority is to meet new people and spread happiness. Then again, you never know what good can come from a single meeting later on. I have experienced this many times.

### **The early bird catches the worm**

I am always expanding my networks. I have noticed that Helsinki is full of interesting events. I aim to attend as many interesting events as possible. I am productive in the morning, and I often start my working day around six or seven. This way, I am also able to expand my networks during the day.

I am a member of the Federation of Finnish Enterprises and the chamber of commerce. I have to pay for these memberships, but I have realised that they are useful in expanding my networks. I also read the NewCo Helsinki website when I search for interesting events and training sessions. My Facebook friends also tell me about upcoming events.



” Remember to consider your situation in life. What ways of networking suit you?

### **Advice for a new entrepreneur**

Think about and analyse your existing networks. How can you utilise them? Don't forget your working life contacts. And remember the so-called second-hand networks.

Make use of the social media. Use the LinkedIn service and update your account regularly. Facebook is also great for networking.

Be active and open about meeting new people! You never know what an encounter with a new person might lead to and how it might benefit your business later on.

But remember to consider your situation in life. Think about the ways of networking that suit you. Prepare a schedule and stick to it; meet people when it suits you.

# Good luck with networking!

Start networking – make it long-term and methodical – but don't forget your well-being. Being a sole trader or a micro entrepreneur, you may find it better to concentrate on building a few solid partnerships than maintaining an extensive but loose network. Good luck!





# Your networking map

Note: Prepare a networking map.

1. List your existing partners in the networking map.
  - a) Business networks
  - b) Networks that support your well-being
  - c) Other partners/networks
2. Think about how you could expand your networks. List potential new partners around your existing network.
3. Write down ways of expanding your network.

**NAME AND ORGANISATION:**

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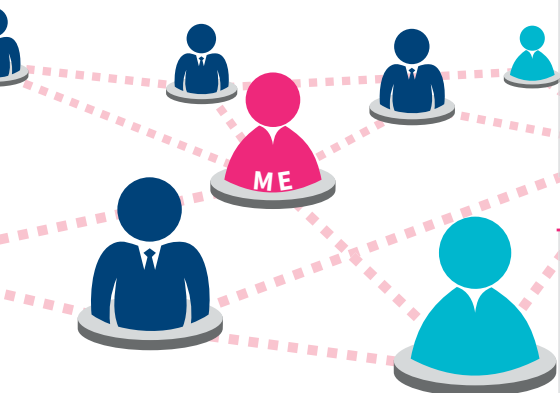
**Ways of expanding networks:**

**NAME AND ORGANISATION:**

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**My cooperation networks**



**NAME AND ORGANISATION:**



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**Ways of expanding networks:**

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*(In applicable parts: Airila, Aho & Nykänen: Verkostot haltuun. Ideoita toimialarajojen ylittämiseen nuorisotyössä. (Grasping networks. Ideas for crossing branch lines in youth work.) Finnish Institute of Occupational Health, Helsinki, 2016)*



*Where do entrepreneurs find new partners? What does networking require? How can different networks support the well-being of entrepreneurs?*

This guidebook is primarily intended for entrepreneurs interested in expanding their networks. This guidebook contains ideas and practical tips on networking and on using networks to promote business operations and entrepreneur well-being.

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