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Businesses Weigh Internet vs. Personal Networking

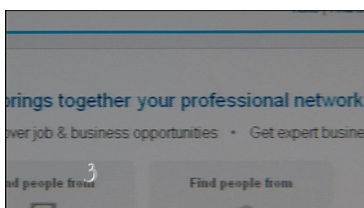


South Burlington, Vermont - May 21, 2008

The Vermont Business and Industry Expo bills itself as northern New England's largest and most extensive business networking event.

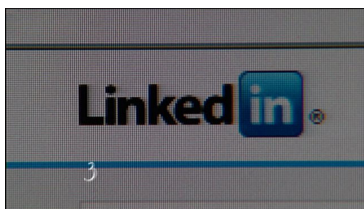


"We have just shy of 200 exhibitors this year, which is up from last year and years past, so we're pretty excited about that," said Antonia Opitz, events director for the Vermont Chamber of Commerce, which organized the event.



But the extent of the Expo is nowhere near the extent of the World Wide Web.

Networking sites like Facebook, MySpace and LinkedIn have exploded in recent years, and businesses like Small Dog Electronics are using them to build their brands.



"What Facebook and social networking sites do is keep people interested," said Geoff Blanck, Small Dog's chief sales and marketing officer. "They get people in, it's very easy to join, it's non-threatening."

Small Dog's business began online. But even it said online networking can't replace the personal networking it does here.



"We do a lot of consulting, a lot of services, a lot of business-to-business," Blanck said, "and for us to build relationships, we need to sit down face to face. We need to explain and listen and learn exactly what people are looking for, and you can't do that on e-mail. You can't

really do that on the web site. You can try to attract people to come to us, but it really takes understanding their needs, and there's no better way to do that in my world than eye contact."

"But we do recognize that times are changing," Opitz said. As important as face-to-face networking is, even the expo's organizers see online networking as a way to help businesses succeed. A special seminar Thursday will teach exhibitors how to be more cyber-savvy.

"We have a panel of experts that are going to be talking about social networking sites and how to use them," Opitz said. "Some are using them as a marketing tool, some are using them to promote their own business."

A sign that times are changing -- the expo said that even this year's exhibitor orientation seminar was held online.

The Expo continues Thursday at the Sheraton Hotel in South Burlington. The e-biz seminar is at 2:00.

[Kate Duffy](#) - WCAAX News



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