ual: london college of fashion



Illustration by Priscilla Fung

How to network

Learn how to make connections and build proffesional relationships you can utilise moving forwards.

What is networking?

Networking uses communication to enhance your professional opportunities. It is a key attribute which can support your employability and you can begin building your network at any stage of your career. Networking involves meeting new people who usually share the same industry, profession or interests as you. The aim of networking is to exchange ideas and information and ultimately build contacts.

You do not need to be extroverted to network strategically and successfully. All you need is an open mind and the right attitude. Start by regularly attending events at university or within your industry. Working slowly, start to ask questions or talk to the other people there. For example, talk to two people, collect 5 different business cards or approach the speaker after the talk. As you increase your interactions, your confidence will grow.

Finding events in London

- Eventbrite
- LCF Graduate Futures
- UAL Careers & Employability
- Business of Fashion
- Sarabande Foundation
- Locals
- Meetup

Useful platforms and tools

Elevator Pitch

An Elevator Pitch can be great for showcasing your skills. It is a short pitch explaining who you are, what you are studying, your skills and what you are interested in doing after graduating.

Practice your conversational pitch before events, for example in the mirror or by recording yourself. Speak in a way that feels natural and comfortable. Research the company or people you will meet before attending an event. This will help you ensure you're making the right contacts and feel more confident, focused and prepared.



Image: Alys Tomlinson

Example:

“I'm Charlie, I'm a knitwear designer and recently graduated from the London College of Fashion. I love working with my hands and spent my placement year working for Simone Rocha developing textiles for her AW23 show which gave me a great insight into how a design team functions. I will be looking for a permanent role in knitwear in September, please think of me if something comes up.”

Business Cards

Having a business card is a great tool to share your details. It should always include your name, email and phone number. Social media handles can also be useful, the ones you include will depend on your professional field.

You can include your course, university and relevant skills. For example “Stylist and Creative Direction Student at London College of Fashion”. When designing your card you can be creative, but always make sure it is appropriate and easy to read.



Image: Errin Yesilkaya

Platforms like Moo.com, Vistaprint and Pixart Printing offer customisable options at affordable prices. - Move to useful links

Business cards are slowly phasing out and people are more likely to directly ask for your email or connect via LinkedIn. Digital business cards such as Blinq are a great way to digitally share all your information using a QR code.

LinkedIn

Update your profile regularly, like you would with your CV. Recruiters and potential employers could look at it before contacting you.

Follow key people and companies within your industry, especially Talent Acquisition managers. Share content and engage in professional conversations. Look for articles, videos, and courses that can enhance your knowledge. Send a personalised message when asking someone to connect or endorse you.

Twitter and Instagram

Consider having separate personal and professional accounts. Develop a content strategy for the professional one with regular updates. Instagram is great to use in the creative industry as it is visual. Use it to showcase your work, inspirations and creative processes to potential collaborators. Comment and engage in discussions related to your industry. Avoid engaging in arguments or using controversial language. You can contact potential employers through direct messaging, but not everyone is keen on this. Sometimes an email is more effective.

Online networks or agencies

Online networks like The Freelancer Club, The Dots and social media groups can be a great way to learn about events, find opportunities and forge collaborations. You can also contact Alumni through your university networks. These are people who have studied your course and are currently working in industry. They can be excellent case studies to inform your job search or a source of potential roles. Connect with UAL and LCF Communities on LinkedIn to explore what alumni are doing.

Professionalism

Body Language

- Body language can make a big difference in the way people engage with you.
- Do not hide in a corner. Make yourself visible by walking around the room.
- Show a welcoming attitude, smile and make eye contact.
- Keep your arms and legs relaxed, try not to fidget.
- Avoid crossing your arms for long periods of time, this can seem defensive.
- Nod and respond appropriately during conversations, to show you are interested.
- Allow others personal space.
- Leave your mobile phone in your bag or pocket unless you need to exchange contact details.

Face to Face

- Don’t be afraid to start a conversation, people are attending the event to make connections.
- Practice remembering and pronouncing names, this is a skill that strengthens over time.
- Try to use open-ended questions to get the ball rolling. Use ice breaking questions or topics like the weather, how you found out about the event or how you know the host can be good openers.



Image: Alys Tomlinson

- Talk about yourself and show examples of your work, but don't forget to take an interest in others. Politely ask questions about their work and career.
- Think about what you can do for others. Perhaps you can connect them with a colleague who may be of interest or share a recent article relating to your conversation.
- Don't monopolise one person's time. Time yourself and wrap up the conversation by exchanging business cards or social media handles.

Follow up

Following up with your new contacts after an event is important. If there were some attendees that you would like to stay connected with, send a friendly email or a direct message. Highlight memorable points from your previous conversations and ask to remain in contact. If there was a cue for a meeting or coffee, reinforce the invitation with some dates. If you are going to send your portfolio, make sure it is in an easy to open format. Be proactive and consistent, nurturing connections long-term rather than expecting them to pay off right now.

Useful Links

- Business of Fashion: How to Network as a Fashion Professional
- Video: 3 Bones of Networking for Student Success



Image: Errin Yesilkaya