

9 Arguments Why You Should Be Networking In Person

9 Reasons Why Founders and Investors Should Be Networking In Person

We live in a hyperconnected world. And in the last three years, courtesy of COVID-19, the digital event sector has really taken off, providing broader access to conferences from all over the world where experts and practitioners mingle in virtual breakout rooms. However, as we have successfully come out of the pandemic-induced digital-first attendance and hybrid events are in vogue, those of us pursuing ambitious business and growth goals need to dive back into the exhilarating world of meeting people face-to-face at industry events.

Because truly, dear reader, nothing compares to the power of building relationships in person. And we have some examples and statistics to back this statement up!

So, grab a [insert your favourite beverage] and let's dive in.

1. The Pandemic Cost Us Our Networks

Let's talk about one of the silent negative effects of the COVID pandemic on our professional lives – we lost a lot of valuable connections.

The Yale University 2021 research "[Social Networks and Loneliness During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)" compared data collected pre-COVID-19 in June 2019 with data collected in the midst of COVID in June 2020. The findings uncovered that "professional and personal networks have shrunk by close to 16% – or by more than 200 people – during the pandemic" and further refers to this phenomenon as "network shrinkage" with long-lasting effects. In other words, our networks will possibly never bounce back without some proactive reaching out on our part.

“Under normal circumstances, our networks don't simply shrink; they're more likely to churn. Rather than slowly losing friends over time as we move, change jobs, or have kids, we usually forge new relationships to replace the ones we've lost. What's unusual about the pandemic is that old relationships aren't being replaced by new ones. At a time when many people are struggling with loneliness and feeling disconnected from work, it's more imperative than ever to be intentional about maintaining connections to casual acquaintances.”

[Quote from Research: We're Losing Touch with Our Networks, Marissa King and Balázs Kovács](#)

Have you yourself noticed the “dents” in your contact list caused by the extended lockdowns? If so, networking in person might be the remedy.

2. Networking in Person is Just More Interactive

If we compare digital vs real-life networking, the latter offers more opportunities for spontaneous exchanges and mingling.

The organisation of digital conferences with networking sessions has drastically improved as we scrambled to emulate personal contact in virtual settings.

However, as much as online participation helps us engage in dialogue with people on the other side of the world from the convenience of our homes or offices, this type of participation tends to be restricted to the event schedule.

Online events are organised to accommodate presentations and question time – and they tend to strip the social parts because, historically, it has been very difficult to connect with other people during webinars or live streams. And let's be honest; we have all been part of events where other attendees are happily not turning their cameras on and staying silent in the chat. This attitude makes it difficult to truly build relationships with other participants or speakers compared to in-person interaction.

In addition, according to the [weak tie theory](#), even a weaker connection [with a new contact outside your network](#) is still valuable.

“It was first introduced by Mark Granovetter in his 1973 paper, “The Strength of Weak Ties,” in which he argued that, while strong ties (i.e., close relationships with friends and family) are important for emotional support, weak ties (i.e., more distant or casual relationships) are more valuable in terms of providing access to new information and opportunities.”

[Quote from the Weak Tie Theory explainer.](#)

3. Networking in Person is More than Words

You cannot underestimate the value of [non-verbal communication](#). In-person networking allows for deeper conversations, fostering trust and stronger connections, not only due to proximity and space for natural exchanges taking place (see above) but also thanks to the nonverbal aspects of communication.

“Non-verbal communication is one of many tools that can help you make a good impression in interviews and in your professional life. However, candidate assessments should be based on skills and qualifications, and workplaces should strive to be inclusive and understanding of individual differences in communication styles.”

[Quote from Indeed's guide to verbal vs nonverbal communication](#)

And there is an additional dimension of networking in person, [which ties to our goal of creating a more inclusive tech and innovation ecosystem in Europe](#) – in-person networking challenges us and helps us implement our vision of inclusivity in real-life scenarios.

“While it is clear that fostering inclusivity generally stems from verbal communication, one should note that actions, more often than not, speak louder than words. For us to embrace change, we

have to be open to it, both mentally and physically. Inquire about differences and meet people where they are most comfortable in order for both worlds to positively collide. When the conversation begins, physically position yourself in such a way that shows your openness, actively listen, respond with curiosity to their statements, seek commonalities and make others feel as if you are the premier person to interact with because of how approachable you are.”

[Quote from “Inclusion Happens Non-Verbally Too” by the Office for Institutional Equity and Diversity](#)

If you are striving towards a world where every voice is heard, you cannot do so without showing up and participating.

4. Networking Serves Many Purposes – and In-Person Networking Helps Achieve All

Did you know that even though “networking” has very operational and business-oriented connotations, it’s very much a tool that can be used to enrich your personal life too?

And networking does not mean meeting new people – it also means deepening existing relationships with your network.

According to the [Psychology.org website](#), we can distinguish:

Operational networking means developing intra-organizational relationships or, in other words, building stronger connections with your colleagues.

Personal networking defines what most people mean when they use the term ‘networking’ – meeting other industry professionals that work in different organizations with the goal of enhancing their careers.

Strategic networking essentially combines the two above-mentioned types of networking.

When you think about it, approaching networking as building relationships that aid you in your professional and personal goals is at its most effective when you network in person.

This type of connection allows the conversation to flow freely and creates opportunities for shared experiences – which, according to the 2019 “[Wanting without enjoying: The social value of sharing experiences](#)” study, are in themselves motivating and actively sought out.

In the context of operational networking, attending events together, especially conferences where you are open to learning and sharing knowledge can be a bonding experience for your existing network.

“The ability of entrepreneurs to create a network of relationships at a personal and/or professional level is more important than their skills. That is not to say that talent isn’t significant, but it just isn’t an overriding quality. Talent is dynamic. However, it requires interaction and authentic mentoring to mature. If it is the beeswax in a candle, then networking is the cotton-braided wick running through the center to maintain a steady, intense illumination by controlling the fuel to the

flame. In keeping with the metaphor, the wick (network) influences how long and bright the candle will burn. Its diameter, stiffness and other such variables will determine the quality of the product.”

[Quote from “Networks Are Everything—More Important Even Than Talent” by Jon Michail](#)

5. VC Networking in Europe is Essential

European VC is still very much a networking game. [According to the recent report](#) by our [Lead Today. Shape Tomorrow. Partner, Speedinvest](#), VCs ranked leads from their own networks as the highest-quality deal flow sources.

“According to investors, the most relevant deal flow sources are proactively self-generated (29%), leads from their professional network (28%), and introductions from other VC firms or angels (21%). While referrals from existing portfolio companies, the management team, LPs / investors, conferences, quantitative sourcing, and Entrepreneurs in Residence were mentioned as sources of deal flow, they were not considered to be of the most relevance or quality.”

[Quote from the Inside the Minds of European VCs report by Speedinvest](#)

And how the argument of in-person networking being of an advantage here applies? The same report talks about the investors paying attention to the management team, as well as placing a lot of value on first impressions. It’s hard to make a lasting impression in an online event, not to mention eloquently present yourself, your skills and expertise that would make you the person to talk to about potential investments.

6. ...and You Know That When VC Attend Startup Events, They Mean Business

Let’s be honest – attending an event in person requires a much bigger investment. We are not talking about the cost of travel but also the personal effort estimation – how valuable and time-worthy would it be for someone to attend in person?

The main source of venture capital deal flow has traditionally been conferences and trade events but the accelerated event industry digitalisation opened up the possibility to reach more people at a lower cost. However, this does not mean that events are dead.

It means that when decision-makers, investors, and startup founders show up at events in person, they are ready to make things happen. Would you not want to speak to someone in a mindset to create opportunities? It’s a rhetorical question 😊

By the way, if you are serious about fundraising, [apply to Grow F](#), our investment readiness program, which will launch at LTST. The selected SaaS startups in the upcoming SaaS cohort will get free tickets to the conference, as well as meet investors interested in their vertical.

7. Train Your Pitch and Hear Constructive Feedback

We do not mean unleashing your startup pitch at unsuspecting attendees at a random event. We mean, come to an event where you can learn from both speakers and attendees.

Lead Today. Shape Tomorrow. tech conference – which is in its 5th edition now, by the way – has always been about bringing the tech and innovation ecosystem together. Thus, we have seen first-hand how connections between founders, mentors, investors, and experts in their field are based on sharing knowledge of the ecosystem and best practices. People, who will attend our event, are no strangers to pitching. So make sure you come prepared with not only your practised pitch, but also a notebook to take notes on how to get better. When an opportunity to pitch your startup presents itself, don't be shy! [Especially if talking about yourself is not something you feel comfortable with normally.](#)

When the time comes for you to convince investors to invest in your startup, you and your team will be ready.

8. Networking in Person Gives You Visibility

[The same European VC report by Speedinvest](#) shared that among the surveyed VCs, 42% admitted to having made a gut decision to invest or not during their first meeting with the management team. By attending an event in person, you get a chance to be in the same room with investors – and a chance to approach them to get your foot in the door.

If you are curious about who will be coming to LTST, check out the [speaker lineup](#) as well as our [partners' page](#). Key ecosystem stakeholders and VCs will be joining us in Vienna to discuss the future of the European tech and innovation scene. This is your chance to meet them in person to build a sure footing for your future personal and professional growth.

“First seek quality over quantity in your overall network. Remember: centrality, in this context, is less a function of how many people you know but who those people are. Identifying and connecting with people who are connected to multiple networks is a key strategy.”

[Quote from “Research: Men and Women Need Different Kinds of Networks to Succeed” by Brian Uzzi](#)

9. Networking In-Person Is Your Chance to Give Back

In the previous couple of paragraphs, we presented you with the benefits you can gain by attending an event.

But with this last argument, we want to ask you:

What value can you offer to other people in the tech and innovation ecosystem?

Is it knowledge? Experience? Influence? Support? Capital? Services? Introductions?

Even becoming part of someone's inner circle as a female leader benefits those close to you.

“Women who were in the top quartile of centrality and had a female-dominated inner circle of 1-3 women landed leadership positions that were 2.5 times higher in authority and pay than those of their female peers lacking this combination. While women who had networks that most resembled those of successful men (i.e., centrality but no female inner circle) placed into leadership positions

that were among the lowest in authority and pay.”

[Quote from “Research: Men and Women Need Different Kinds of Networks to Succeed” by Brian Uzzi](#)

Here, we have to quote a [recent opinion piece](#) by [Emma Rees](#), CEO and Co-Founder of Deployed, who wrote about the issue of lack of allyship between female investors and female founders:

“So while I’m not yet at the stage or level of success where I can send the elevator back down, I can help others like me who are still in the lobby, and show them that there is a perfectly good set of stairs, and lots of people like us who will all walk up together.”

Ultimately, whatever it is that you decide to give back, it’s invaluable. You are part of the ecosystem and there are ways for you to actively participate in making sure the future of tech and innovation shapes up to be more inclusive and diverse. The first step is to show up, recognise what needs to be done, learn, and implement.

And all of these are best done in person.

Network with the Female Founders Community in Vienna this October!

Are you ready to network? [Then take the next step and join us in Vienna](#) at LEAD TODAY. SHAPE TOMORROW. You will meet fellow innovators, experts, founders, and investors eager to commit to and co-create an inclusive world.



Marketing Communications Manager at Female Founders

I am an always-learning-something-new marketing all-rounder with over 13 years of experience under my belt. I excel at content marketing strategy and delivering creative and engaging content for all stages of the inbound marketing funnel. I became interested in SEO in 2014 after launching (another) lifestyle blog and quickly found deep and unadulterated pleasure in combining SEO with content creation for websites.