



Guide.

How do you build a quality network when you are a business school student?

Networking is a crucial skill for business school students. This can open up both professional and personal opportunities. As you make connections with others, you open the door to new perspectives, mentorship collaborations and employment opportunities. In this guide written by the EM Normandie Alumni Association, we will try to give you the keys to make the most of these opportunities and build a solid network in business school and beyond.

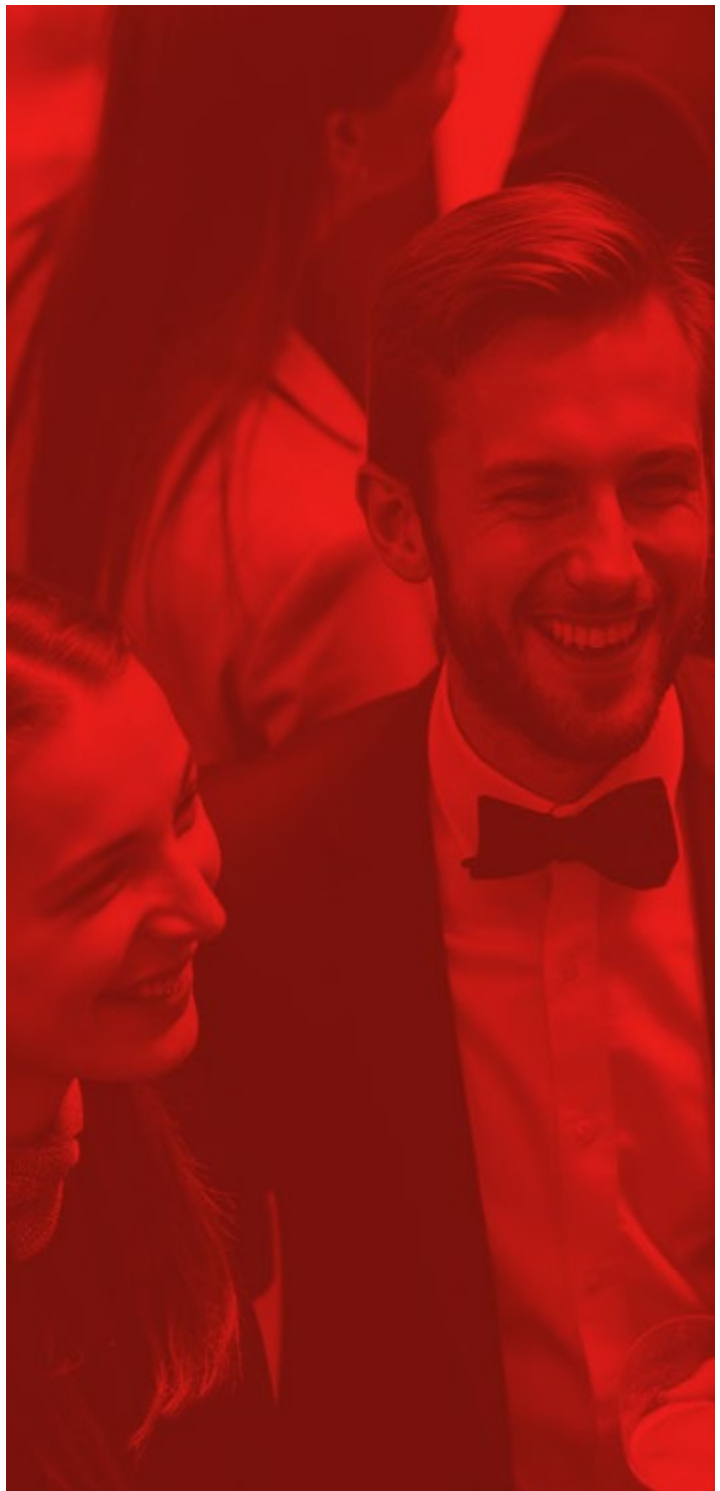


UNDERSTANDING THE IMPORTANCE OF NETWORKS

Networking is not optional for business school students. It is a strategic way of building professional relationships and increasing career opportunities. A high-quality network is of vital importance and is one of business schools' main selling points. People go to business school not only for the quality of the training they receive, but also for the unique network they will have access to for the rest of their lives. The EM Normandie alumni association has 26,000 members. It is a great way to meet new people and boost your career. By understanding the crucial importance of creating a network, students will be motivated to invest time and effort in building their own circle.

But to make this a reality, you need to clarify your short- and long-term career objectives. What are you looking for in a network? Are you looking for a specific job, career advice, or simply opportunities to chat? A clear understanding of your objectives will help you choose which events and people to include in your network. Business schools offer a myriad of networking opportunities.

When you join a business school like EM Normandie Business School, a historic institution with seven campuses in France and abroad (Caen, Le Havre, Paris, Dubai, Boston, Oxford and Dublin), you can attend conferences, workshops and events organised by the School or its Alumni Association.



Some schools, such as EM Normandie with its Alumni Association, have clubs. These are great ways for students to meet people in their chosen business sector: luxury goods, supply chain, sustainable development, marketing, and more. These clubs hold events on a regular basis, so students can meet graduates who can play a role in their chosen career path. It really is the best way to make your projects grow and become a reality.

Laura Bidaut, a 2020 graduate of EM Normandie, is currently a PhD student in Management Sciences at the University of Montpellier, focusing on entrepreneurship. She joined the school in Caen as a post-baccalaureate student and completed a Master 2 in "Start-ups and Digital Development". In her view, building up a quality network is essential for a number of reasons. «Either because you'll be moving to a town where you don't know anyone, or because you're looking for a job.»



She believes that you should «not hesitate to get in touch with other students and graduates of your school, either through the alumni website, which offers a detailed directory of graduates, or directly on LinkedIn». For Laura, building a network means making new connections, meeting unexpected people and creating new opportunities. She says that her «networks have always been useful to me, whether it's the EM Normandie network or my personal network. Every time I looked for a job, unsuspected people from the school came and wrote to me on LinkedIn to help me, give me guidance and so on.»

She founded the Dijon club. Laura is the EM Normandie Alumni Association's ambassador in this beautiful French city. She says she «organised my first after-work event this winter. And I met an alumni who works in a competitiveness cluster, whom I'll be meeting again soon to interview for my thesis. So, if I hadn't created the club, I'd probably never have seen it!»

As Laura explained, taking part in events to expand your knowledge outside the school confines is a great way to boost your network. You do need to take the lead in building your own network, however. Identify the right events and the right people, for example via your school's Alumni Association website, which hosts a community directory and lists upcoming events. You can also get in touch with professionals on LinkedIn, a social network dedicated to the world of work. LinkedIn is another powerful tool for expanding your network.

Create a comprehensive profile, showcase your skills and experience, and connect with industry professionals that interest you. Participate in groups related to your chosen sector and share interesting content. And don't ignore other platforms that might offer a chance for more informal connections.

Your first customers are the members of your network

We spoke to three EM Normandie graduates about their views on the subject. We met Frédérique Cintrat, who graduated from EM Normandie in 1987. In this interview, she looked back on her time at the school.

She tells us how she managed to build up a network, and how it has allowed her to find everything faster: information, customers, service providers, supports, shared commitments, jobs, transport and, last but not least, the pleasure of conversation.

Frédérique told us about her career path. «I have held various sales and marketing positions in the loan, insurance and assistance sectors. In 2013, I was voted Insurance Woman of the Year by Internet users and Saleswoman of the Year by a panel of insurance professionals. In 2014, Action Commerciale magazine named me one of France's 100 most influential sales managers.

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A wealth of professional experience that Frédérique also attributes to the quality of her professional network. As she explains, «a network is built over time and, above all, is maintained. It is not when you need it that you should finally take an interest in it. Building a network means forging professional links, knowing who does what and who needs what, who knows who, who needs who and who needs what.»

According to Frédérique, «the performance of a network is measured not so much by the quality but by the closeness of the link and the type of exchanges you have with each person». She believes that «getting back in touch with someone you haven't been interested in for years just when you need them, when you were silent when they needed a hand, for example, is not necessarily the best thing to do».

If you are just starting out as an entrepreneur, remember that your first customers are often the members of your network who will get you started, and often, as was the case for Frédérique, it's your former competitors who end up being your strongest allies. So, how do you go about it? The first thing to do is to take an interest in other people, what they do and who they are. A golden rule of common sense: «if you're someone who's a pleasure to work with, it will be easy to build up and retain your network».

Your time is limited and you can't maintain strong links with everyone, but social networks, and LinkedIn in particular, allow you to keep up to date with what's going on around you, to suggest a coffee from time to time if both people are interested, and to send a quick note of appreciation. Keeping in touch with fellow business school students is a good start, for example. Frédérique says that you need to keep in touch with people from your year, for example.

NETWORKS ALLOW SKILLS TO BE RECOGNISED

We also spoke to Quentin Bedu, who graduated from EM Normandie's Grande Ecole programme in 2021. He is now a Senior Consultant at Deloitte Conseil. He works on strategic issues such as choosing tools, defining solutions for optimising operations by transforming processes, organisation and information systems. He believes that building a quality network is important for a number of reasons.

Quentin believes that «first, a network allows your skills to be recognised within a certain circle, which begins quite close to you when you first start out, and then grows wider over time. It also helps you build your career, either by changing companies, getting a promotion or taking on new responsibilities. Recognition helps boost your profile among professionals in a sector, company or industry. This is vital, because in addition to having a large number of contacts, you need to be known for your strengths.»

When it comes to building his network, Quentin says he has never regretted calling someone or asking a question. The important thing is to apply the same values to your work as you do in life: respect, kindness and integrity. Your network is always useful for keeping up to date with the latest news, market trends, job vacancies and discovering new technological or creative solutions. All this information can be used to form an opinion on professions and areas of activity, to identify career opportunities and to meet people.

The vast web of links between people creates a network of information that is unique and specific to each individual, enabling them to enrich their intellectual lives and make informed choices about how to grow and develop. The best approach is to subconsciously consider each moment as an event that could add to your network. Simply being in a course could allow you to meet people and make connections. In addition, the Alumni Association regularly organises events such as conferences, workshops, seminars and networking events, all of which provide opportunities to meet professionals and expand your network.





In conclusion, building a network at business school is a valuable investment in your professional future. By following these steps, you can develop meaningful relationships that will have a positive impact on your career. Networking is not a one-off activity, but an ongoing process. Take a strategic approach, and you will build a quality network that will support you throughout your career.

Domitille Mesnard, General Delegate of the EM Normandie Alumni Association, agrees with Frédérique. «You shouldn't wait until you need your network to start building it, because then it will be too late. There are many opportunities for students and graduates to connect with each other throughout the year, and I always encourage younger students to attend the events organised for the community as these are wonderful opportunities to meet professionals in a warm, informal setting.» It's always easier to talk to someone over a drink than to pick up the phone and start prospecting. Mentoring offered by certain schools and alumni associations is also a great way to get to know a professional and benefit from their experience.



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