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How to Connect With Other Creatives



It started with a blind date: I was on the phone with recruiter Melissa Singer, lamenting the design community's lack of dialog on in-house design issues,

when she interrupted me. She'd had the same conversation recently with Glenn Arnowitz, a design director at pharmaceutical giant Wyeth. Playing matchmaker, she gave me his number.

Given the major differences between our two companies (soft toys and pharmaceuticals), I wondered what we'd talk about. It was clear right away that wouldn't be a problem. That first conversation led to our first "date," lunch in the Wyeth cafeteria. Over turkey wraps and pasta salad, we talked about chargebacks, uncooperative internal clients, expanding workloads and shrinking staffs. And we realized we couldn't be the only in-house designers out there in need of a comrade in arms.

So we decided to throw a "party" and see who showed up. We raided existing design groups' membership lists, trade publications and our vendors' Rolodexes to create a mailing list for the tristate area. Our party took the form of a seminar held at Wyeth devoted to in-house issues. Peter Phillips of the Design Management Institute cajoled, scolded and inspired the group about how to gain respect and elevate their status within their companies. The attendees were so jazzed that we had to practically kick them out of the building.

Out of that meeting, we formed Insource, an association focused on in-house design issues. Yet even with the formation of a board of directors, a Web site and more seminars, it's still the informal "dates," where we swap war stories and trade strategies, that are the most rewarding.



How to NETWORK



1. Talk to your vendors to find other in-house designers.
2. Don't be afraid to pick up the phone and cold call to set up a "date"; chances are whomever you call will be thrilled to find a fellow in-house designer.
3. Work with existing design entities to expand your group and find relevant speakers. HOW, AIGA and the Design Management Institute (DMI) are good places to start.
4. Take advantage of your company's resources to network and host an event. This could include meeting space, audiovisual equipment, printing and business/legal advice. You can sell this to your boss by emphasizing how it will expand your business knowledge and skill set.