

The Solutions Engineer's Guide to Strategic Networking

Building a Foundation for Career Growth

As a Solutions Engineer (SE), your network isn't just a list of contacts. It's your secret weapon for long-term career success. Remember, networking isn't about collecting contacts. It's about building strong, mutually beneficial relationships that open doors that you didn't even know existed.

Let's dive into how top SEs build networks that supercharge career growth.

SE Networking Basics

Don't underestimate the power of genuine human connection. It sounds obvious, but it bears repeating: in-person relationships are always deeper than what you get through a screen. When you prioritize human interactions — and even friendships! — your connections will be stronger and yield better results.

As an SE, keep in mind that your professional interactions should be focused on solving specific problems. When reaching out to others, frame the conversation around their challenges, not what you want out of the relationship. Even if you're an aspiring SE, you can still position yourself as a peer with equally valuable insights. All networking should be based on a mutually beneficial exchange.

The skills you build in networking also come in handy in your role as an SE. The modern SE is all about being a strategic consensus builder. Success hinges on your ability to gain buy-in across the business. For instance, you often have to be "multi-threaded" and engaged with departments across the business. In much the same way, you have to build your network across multiple organizations, communities, and groups.

Five Key Strategies for Expanding Your Network

01 Be Proactive in Reaching Out to Leaders and Peers

Networking won't happen to you — you have to be proactive. Reach out to industry leaders. Find relevant communities. If you're trying to become an SE or learn more about a company, connect with their existing SEs. Ask for 10 minutes of their time to chat. Keep it low stakes and low commitment.

Remember to connect with recruiters and hiring managers too! They often have a deeper understanding of the market and are more than willing to help.

02 Seek Out and Participate in In-Person Events

In the era of remote work, face-to-face interactions are more impactful than ever. Prioritize attending in-person events in your field (or the field you want to get into). Community gatherings are excellent places to find new connections and deepen existing ones!

These events are the perfect opportunity to build rapport in a way that you can't digitally. The relationships you build in person have a stronger foundation and a longer-lasting impact.

03 Increase Your Internal Visibility

Don't forget how important your internal reputation is. Look for ways to actively build your visibility. Sharing your best practices and valuable intel is a great place to start. Showcase what "good looks like" by creating and offering resources that highlight your most successful strategies.

A great way to get buy-in and improve your reputation is to build strategic relationships centered on providing value to them. Ask yourself "how can I help them?" and before long, you'll have a reputation as a trusted resource.

04 Leverage LinkedIn as a Professional Hub

LinkedIn is more than a resume. It's a place to actively build your strategic network. Use it as your main hub to connect with peers, follow influential leaders, and engage with relevant content.

Don't just passively scroll either. Share your own insights, celebrate the successes of your peers, and publicly thank those who have helped you. Engaging with your network on LinkedIn is a fantastic way to accelerate your career and increase your visibility.

05 Be Intentional About Building Both Internal and External Networks

Don't focus on one type of network over the other. Your internal and external networks are both crucial for career success.

Your internal network helps you navigate your current organization. It lets you build cross-functional buy-in and find internal opportunities.

Your external network, on the other hand, is the key to staying informed on industry trends. You may also discover new career paths, and it gives you a critical safety net. By cultivating both networks, you keep yourself well-positioned for career success — now and into the future!