

## A Networking Pro Learns Some New Tricks

By JOANN S. LUBLIN

Can you teach a dinosaur to dance? More importantly, can you teach him to network in 21st Century style? I was skeptical. But George Langis, a veteran turnaround executive, dispelled doubts by learning new networking steps that may hasten his job hunt. He went from conventional handshake networking to creating a personal brand that would be easily marketable online. Though Mr. Langis still hesitates to plunge into "tweeting," his experience could benefit countless other older applicants with rusty job-hunting skills.

*Isaac Brekken for the Wall Street Journal*

Our experts considered George Langis, a veteran turnaround executive, a deft conventional networker who needed to broaden his online reach. Unemployment among Americans age 55 and up has exceeded 6% every month since March 2009, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics figures show. That represents the highest joblessness rate for this age group in almost 60 years. The rate, though, is lower than the overall jobless rate as well the rates for all other age groups.

Mr. Langis helped fix nine small and midsize concerns since 2000, following a lengthy corporate-finance career. His last turnaround gig, as interim chief executive of Turbine Generator Maintenance Inc. in Cape Coral, Fla., ended in late November.

At my request, three networking specialists devised innovative approaches for Mr. Langis after traditional tactics, such as his recent sessions with 79 contacts in eight cities, failed to bear fruit. He embraced nearly all of their ideas. They range from drafting a "networking profile" to joining a global network of expert consultants typically retained for an hour at a time.

"Dinosaurs do dance," insists Mr. Langis, a 63-year-old resident of Henderson, Nev., with broad shoulders and smiles. "I lead change in companies. I can certainly change."

He acquired his fresh dance steps from Alicia Whitaker, a New York executive coach; Stephanie Daniel, an outplacement counselor for a unit of Keystone Partners, a Boston human-resources consultancy; and Diane Darling, founder of Effective Networking Inc. in Boston.

For starters, they consider Mr. Langis a deft conventional networker. They cite his month-long "Sell George" tour this winter to see contacts he collected during his career. And then there's the regular email and telephone interaction with his roughly 500 best contacts—even while toiling 70 hours a week on a turnaround. "George does most of his critical networking face to face," Ms. Daniel observes.

Mr. Langis doesn't send text messages, "friend" anyone via Facebook or send tweets to people on Twitter, a micro-blogging service. Bolstering his outreach will produce "a more strategic and more defined network," Ms. Darling says.

For people like Mr. Langis who aren't yet comfortable about putting themselves on multiple social networks, there are some clever ways to create a presence online. Here are the top tips from his informal advisers:

- **Develop a stronger online identity by revamping your résumé.** Mr. Langis's résumé contained a vague summary statement, calling him "a seasoned executive" who served distressed and healthy businesses. To better catch someone's eye online, the experts encouraged him to tout his turnaround stints. Ms. Whitaker believes he could better convey his passion and experience with this summary statement: "I make sick companies significantly better for owners and employees." Mr. Langis says he altered the wording "the day it was suggested."

**Ms. Daniel urged Mr. Langis to create a networking profile, too. The document typically describes a job seeker's 20 target employers, desired positions and career plans. It also contains a brief review of accomplishments. A networking profile "could increase the productive leads he receives from his networking contacts," Ms. Daniel says. He can present the document when he meets someone face to face for the first time or "he can store it online through LinkedIn," she says.**

- **Make better use of LinkedIn, a professional networking Web site.** Heeding the trio's suggestions, Mr. Langis revived his inactive LinkedIn account. He expanded his barebones professional description and added 1,500 of his contacts to LinkedIn. Most of his contacts are private-equity industry players.

Mr. Langis discovered only 72 contacts belong to LinkedIn, which has more than 60 million members worldwide. "I hope my being there will attract those who are not among my current contacts," he says. He then inserted his simplified LinkedIn address below his automatic signature on email messages. Ms. Darling suggests Mr. Langis solicit LinkedIn testimonials from prior bosses. Ms. Daniel thinks he should join specialized LinkedIn groups, such as the one for consultants with expertise in management changes and turnarounds, and connect with international professionals in his field.

- **Create a more visible personal brand.** Mr. Langis admits he lacks a well-known brand as a turnaround specialist. He never knew he might benefit, as Ms. Whitaker suggested, from consulting for a rent-an-expert network, which provides small doses of specialized information.

Gerson Lehrman Group, for instance, has enrolled about 250,000 experts worldwide. They typically earn about \$350 an hour, according to Margaret Molloy, a senior vice president of the New York concern. Clients, which include private-equity firms, tap experts' knowledge through short phone calls or consultations over meals.

Positioning yourself as a thought leader this way will broaden your pool of potential employers, Ms. Whitaker told Mr. Langis. Private-equity companies "are not necessarily out in the market scanning for new talent all the time," she notes. Ms. Darling believes Mr. Langis could further heighten his visibility if he gave speeches, wrote trade-press articles and taught Webinars for alumni of schools where he received degrees. "When you are a speaker, you are instantly networking with 100 people," she says.

Mr. Langis addressed a College of Southern Nevada class last week at the invitation of his handyman's son, who is a student there. He says he told business students "what I do and how I got there." His last campus speaking engagement occurred around 1998, the executive recalls.

- **Get a bigger payoff from industry events.** Mr. Langis usually finds himself so busy doing turnarounds that he lacks time for meetings of the Turnaround Management Association, a professional group. Ms. Darling says he should find the time to help the group arrange for speakers because he'll earn a program mention that pops up in Google when hiring managers check his name.

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When he simply attends a conference, Mr. Langis might obtain the participant list in advance and arrange casual events for those he wants to know, Ms. Whitaker proposes. He could invite people for drinks or sit together at a certain breakfast table. Playing host "can be more effective than generally 'working the room,'" she adds. Mr. Langis rejected some of the recommendations, such as using Twitter. With brief Twitter messages, Ms. Daniel believes, he could update contacts about his search and alert them about interesting articles. "Give and take is what networking is all about," she says.

Mr. Langis, though, considers Twitter to be "a little bit hokey." Nevertheless, "I'm willing to try new things," he says. His multi-month job search is "just taking longer than usual," Mr. Langis observes. But with these new strategies, he's confident that his hunt will soon experience its own turnaround.

**Write to Joann S. Lublin at [joann.lublin@wsj.com](mailto:joann.lublin@wsj.com).**