

No holes in Swiss online networking theory

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Often, it's not what you know, but who you know when it comes to business and research success and that still applies even in the age of online social networking, according to results to be published in the *International Journal of Organisational Design and Engineering*.

Peter Gloor, Pierre Dorsaz, Hauke Fuehres and Manfred Vogel of the MIT Center for [Collective Intelligence](#), in Cambridge, Massachusetts have compared the success of startup [entrepreneurs](#) and [innovators](#) with their activity on the [social networking sites](#) LinkedIn and Facebook as well as email networks including swissnex Boston, which acts as a US-based science and technology outpost to connect Swiss and US entrepreneurs and academics.

Specifically, they focused on entrepreneurship-coaching programs and found that those people more centrally positioned in the various types of network, tended to be the more successful players in business and research. As one might expect, proximity within the networks to other successful people also correlated with their success.

Interestingly, however, the even more successful members of the networks analyzed tended to have an affiliation or were alumni of the prominent research center ETH Zurich. This confirmed the value of pre-existing social capital acquired while attending such an academic institution, the team suggests. In practical terms, they believe their detailed findings have wider implications for entrepreneurs, [venture capitalists](#), academics and those finding ways to connect these people.

The received wisdom suggests that academic alumni associations and business networking organizations do help startup entrepreneurs become successful, but little quantitative and qualitative research has been carried out previously to demonstrate this idea one way or the other. Gloor and colleagues put the notion on a much firmer theoretical footing and allude to the synergistic effects that might arise between the various offline and online connections individuals make. The team concludes that because online [social networking](#) appears to be an efficient tool for business networking, hubs, mentoring organizations and other networks should fully integrate their online presence into their offering in order to support network building between entrepreneurs and academics as part of their so-called mission statement.

More information: "Choosing the right friends – predicting success of startup entrepreneurs and innovators through their online social network structure" in *Int. J. Organisational Design and Engineering*, 2013, 3, 67-85

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