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From the Oct. 2007 Issue

British anthropologist Robin Dunbar originally posited what's now become known simply as Dunbar's number. The number, which is 150, was popularized by Malcom Gladwell in his recent best-selling business book, "The Tipping Point," and represents the theoretical maximum size of group in which all the members can maintain a "relationship." Dunbar defined that relationship as one that required every group member to know who each person is and how each person relates socially to every other person in the group. It's generally accepted that group sizes larger than this usually require more restrictive rules and regulations to maintain order. So what does this have to do with us in the public accounting and technology community? I believe it has plenty do with us, and I'll explain why.

Unless you've been living under a rock, you've probably heard of MySpace. It's the fabulously successful "social networking" website owned by Rupert Murdoch's News Corp. MySpace now includes nearly 200 MILLION accounts and claims to be adding accounts at the rate of 250,000 per DAY! Technology is, if not increasing Dunbar's number, then, certainly assisting in management of those individuals included in it. It's my observation that practicing accountants aren't well-represented on MySpace (although results for a search of "CPA" included 22,000 hits), nor are they big users of the other players in the "social networking" field.

The others I'd include in this space are Windows Live Spaces, Friendster, Facebook, LinkedIn and Plaxo. While some are clearly student and personal-contact oriented, others are moving inexorably toward the business and professional space. Just over two years ago, Ried Elsilver's LexisNexis unit acquired

Interface software and has now integrated it into its product line as a CRM

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Turned down what's going on here.

Simply stated, it's the search for the Holy Grail. In this case, the Grail is a single repository for everyone to keep in contact with everyone else. I'm not at all certain that we'll ever have that (or even if it's advisable), but I am sure that there are ramifications for practicing accountants. Business and professional people are beginning to realize that the FOAF (friend-of-a-friend) system of social networking is an efficient and helpful way to either manage your 150 friends, or to significantly increase the number. Visionary practitioners (notice I said visionary, not young; those terms are neither synonymous nor mutually exclusive) are beginning to show up on these networks regularly. If you're smart, you'll consider joining them. But how? And which one? Who will win the race? What should we be doing? My advice? At a minimum, you should be "discoverable" if someone is seeking you out. The following are all FREE and can be implemented in a few hours.

www.LINKEDIN.com

Set up a LinkedIn account. You create a profile that details your education, employment and professional accomplishments. Once you're "found," former and current colleagues can "add" you to their networks as a "connection." And you can add them, as well. Your "connections" are then visible to those to whom you are connected, and so forth. It's sort of like "six degrees" for real life! You add more connections by inviting trusted contacts to join the system and connect to you, ultimately linking you to thousands of other professionals.

www.FACEBOOK.com

Set up an account here, too. It's just too active to skip. In 15 minutes, you can have a respectable bio up and available. It's much like LinkedIn,

but definitely serving a younger demographic. For now. It's changing daily,

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information, it's automatically reflected in the address books of every other connected Plaxo member. For example, I recently changed my fax number. I simply updated my Plaxo account, and every one of my Plaxo member contacts had my new number instantly. It's very clever and very handy. In early August, Plaxo rolled out a service called Plaxo Pulse, which holds great promise in that "race for the Holy Grail." It solves the multiple platform problem through aggregation. It's much too early to opine on Pulse, but it does hold some promise.

WHAT TO SKIP

Friendster, Windows Live Spaces and MySpace. These three are consumer level and extremely youth oriented. Save your time; don't bother.

Note: I'm listed on all three of the sites suggested above. When you sign up, be sure to add me to your network. I promise to accept your invitation.

Technology

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