

NSPRA This Week – Tip of the Week

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Using the Ning Platform to Create Online Social Networks

The Ning Platform enables Internet users to create their own social networks. Nings can be created for any type of group imaginable, including alumni groups, school groups, faculties, departments, families, and more. According to the Ning Web site (www.ning.com), anyone can sign up to create, discover, or join social networks using the Ning Platform.

When you create a social network on Ning, it is free by default and runs ads that Ning controls. Once created, the Ning can be used to share best practices, links, photos, videos and other information. Generally, the success of a Ning depends entirely on its members and how they use it. For educators, Nings have become an increasingly popular way to network with other people and groups who share similar interests with you and your school district. Here are a few examples of how school districts can use Nings:

- School PR professionals can use a Ning site to share publications and news items about a school district with anyone who signs up as a member (parents, students, staff).
- School district administrative and leadership teams can work together and communicate via a Ning and avoid having to use long email lists and attachments to share information.
- PTA leaders can create Nings to connect their members.
- Teachers can create Nings for their departments, their schools, their districts, or for fellow teachers around the country to share curriculum materials, teaching tips and tactics, or other information.

Nings can be used for small niche networks (teachers within a department, for example) or in a larger way (state or regional public relations professionals). You can set the privacy level, restricting membership by invitation only or keeping it open to anyone who wants to join. Free Ning tools include discussion forums, chats, video sharing, photo sharing, link sharing, and more. You can also set the frequency with which you'll receive updates from your Ning groups. The Ning Premium service, at \$19.95 a month, allows you to point your Ning to a domain name and to add or delete advertising, among other details. But the free service fits most groups well.

In New York's Hudson Valley region, members of the New York NSPRA chapter (NYSPRA) created a group Ning for school PR professionals where they can share best practices and put their collective brain trust together on such topics as the local press, school budget challenges, and upcoming meetings. They've also created several subgroups within the Ning, including one on using technology.

Here are links to the Hudson Valley PR Ning and other sample Nings on the web:

- **The HudSPRA Network** (Private Ning created for school PR pros in the Hudson Valley region):
www.hudspira.org
- **Classroom 2.0** (Open Ning for teachers to share professional development information):
<http://www.classroom20.com>
- **PR Open Mic** (Open Ning for PR students, faculty members and practitioners):
<http://www.propenmic.org>
- **The Hurricane Information Center** (Open Ning for individuals interested in hurricane updates):
<http://gustav08.ning.com>

Thousands of alumni group Nings are already online. Some are affiliated with schools, districts, colleges, and universities, but most have been created solely by graduates as a way to reconnect. Here are some examples:

- **Clarion Area HS Alumni Network** (Open Alumni Ning not affiliated the with school or district): <http://clarionarea.ning.com>
- **Lindblom Eagles Alumni** (Open Alumni Ning not affiliated with the school or district): <http://lindblom.ning.com>
- **Brookline HS Alumni Network** (Open Alumni Ning affiliated with the district's alumni association): <http://brooklinehigh.ning.com>

Some unaffiliated alumni sites are well-managed by volunteer grads with stated “rules” for posting photos and comments, and a professional look. But others are not. You can find out if your schools or districts have unaffiliated alumni group Nings by searching the Ning site. It may be useful to view open groups in order to find graduates to highlight in publications or to learn more about the groups themselves. And you may even find your own high school or college groups online as well.

The best way to learn about Nings is to join one or start one. Explore the Ning site for groups that may interest you, or create a Ning for your own personal or professional group.

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