

The Global Handshake: Networking around the world with ORIENTED.com

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Is it possible to network with professionals in the Asia Pacific, North America and other regions, all at the same time?

Yes, says Christine Hsu, founder of ORIENTED.com, a global network of more than 28,000 professionals interested in Asian businesses and partnerships. Its signature happy hours are held simultaneously every month in more than 12 cities, bringing together professionals in Beijing, Shanghai, Taipei, Hong Kong, Macau, Singapore, Sydney, Toronto, New York, Portland, Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay Area. Business lunch hours and China industry tours are also in the works.

The group's first happy hours were held in 2002 in Shanghai, Taipei and Beijing, as a way to help international professionals in Asia stay in touch amidst hectic travel and work schedules. "Everyone is so scattered, and yet, networking is critical to doing business in Asia — it's a part of life," Hsu said. "We needed a regular monthly forum where everyone knows to meet and can plan their schedules around."



Because the happy hours are held at the same time in all cities (the last Thursdays of the month, between 7 and 9 p.m.), "it really feels like we're all connected," Hsu said. "A number of people even plan their business trips around our happy hours, so they know when they get there, they can instantly tap into the ORIENTED network."

Linda Kong, the group's business development manager, said many members are affectionately referred to as "BMW's" — bilingual, mid-career, Western-trained professionals. "They are some of the most active movers and shakers in their communities, because they understand the importance of networking and building partnerships," Kong said. "Through our online services and offline events, we have effectively created a global guanxi that is helping people to find jobs, new business opportunities and new friends, all over the world." Guanxi means "network" or "connection" in Chinese.

While ORIENTED was established to help those interested in opportunities in Asia, today it is also serving those who want to be in the U.S. and elsewhere in the world. "At our Bay Area events, it's not unusual to hear English, Mandarin, Cantonese and other languages spoken — a truly international environment," said Sue Tsai, head organizer of the group's San Francisco Bay Area events.

The group partners with businesses and organizations that serve Asia's international business communities. Most recently, it worked with the Cheung Kong Graduate School of Business, founded by Li Ka-Shing, one of the most powerful business icons in Asia.

"We wanted to promote our China-based graduate programs to professionals across North America, but we couldn't figure out how to reach that audience," said Jonathan Tang, the graduate school's international communications and marketing manager. "After hearing about ORIENTED's community of sophisticated and ambitious individuals, we immediately decided to partner with them."

"By bringing international professionals together to network and exchange new ideas, we are helping to forge long-term partnerships in ways that even we can't imagine," Hsu said.