



10 EFFECTIVE BUSINESS NETWORKING TIPS

Networking is probably the most effective and least expensive marketing method you can use to build your business or practice, especially if you do business in your local area.

Here are some tips that can ensure your networking success.

1. Choose the right venues. Not every group of people will be right for you. Choose groups where people congregate who share your interests and/or are potential clients. Chambers of Commerce, men's and women's organizations, networking groups, special interest groups, and associations are all potential choices.

2. Develop relationships. Networking is not about selling, but rather developing relationships that can lead to sales or referrals. The idea is to get to know people and allow them to get to know you.

Often, people approach networking with the hope of making a sale or getting a client after one visit to an appropriate group. That's not how it works. People do business with those they know and trust and it can take time to build up that knowledge and trust. So approach a networking event without any expectation of getting new business. Instead go with the idea of meeting new people or schmoozing with those you've already gotten to know.

3. Dress appropriately and professionally. Establish yourself as a successful person, which you can do by dressing the part. This does not mean that you need to wear expensive clothes, but do wear something a bit on the dressy side and leave the comfortable baggy pants at home. If necessary, get advice from an image consultant.

4. Be prepared. Bring plenty of business cards, but only give them to people who show a real interest in what you do. Brochures or printed postcards can also be effective. Also, craft a short description of what you do — no more than 10 or 15 seconds.

5. Ask questions and listen. You don't have to talk a lot about what you do in order to find potential customers. Rather, ask people you meet questions about them and their business, then listen carefully to their answers. Find points of commonality that you can bring into the conversation.



6. Sit with people you don't know. Many events have walk-around networking followed by a sit-down meeting of some sort. During the walk-around, do talk to people you have met before to enhance your relationship, but sit with people you don't know in order to widen your network and meet potential customers. Here too, ask questions and listen.

7. Talk to people who are standing alone. People attend networking events to meet others. If someone is standing alone, that's the perfect opportunity to make a new contact. You might want to start the conversation by saying, "May I join you?"

8. Move on – politely. Don't spend all of your time talking to one person. Gather the information you need, exchange business cards, if appropriate, and move on. Say, "I'd like to do some mixing now. It's been a pleasure speaking to you."

9. Give to get. Focus on what you can do for others, not what they can do for you. Perhaps you know someone who could use your prospects services. If you do, make the referral.

10. Follow up. If you make a good connection with someone, after the event, send a note saying how much you enjoyed meeting them. If appropriate, send an article or some kind of information that they might find helpful. Do not add them to your mailing list without their permission.

TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS NETWORKING

Most professionals don't do enough networking, and their worst business networking mistake is that they don't build a professional network until they really need one – and that's a bit late.

You can become a magnet which attracts people and resources if you invest the time and energy necessary to develop a strong network of contacts. Business networking requires a leap for many professionals. Depending on your personality, meeting strangers and greeting people that you hardly know can be stressful and even - scary.

Walking into a group of strangers, extending your hand and introducing yourself can be daunting for many. Others love the experience of meeting new people and plunge into business networking events with elan and skill. No matter where you fall on this continuum, you can improve your networking skill and comfort. It's worth it for your career and for the opportunity to give and receive assistance.



The 10 Advantages of Business Networking

- You can effectively network and, in the process, create these results.
- Build a network of partners to keep an open eye and ear for new opportunities for you, and vice versa, you for them. Networking is only effective when it is mutually beneficial.
- Reach targeted individuals for your business or career in two ways: directly or indirectly through your contacts. Expand your network through colleagues with a reach that you cannot develop by yourself.
- Build visibility within your industry or profession by raising your profile. Go to every social and business gathering that you possibly can.
- Build visibility within your community to assist your organization to develop a reputation as an employer of choice. It will help you recruit and retain great employees. Your community will look upon you as the face of your business.
- Build a strong network with coworkers within your organization to accomplish work more successfully by utilizing your network of mutually beneficial relationships.
- Create a diverse network of people with whom you can share ideas and gain information. Nothing is as effective as bouncing ideas back and forth with another professional whom you admire.
- Aim for a diverse group of people from whom you can learn. Other business people and professionals have much to teach and share when an individual is open to learning and change ideas.
- You will contribute to charitable and community causes. Many business networking events involve fundraising or volunteering. For people who are shy when meeting new people, these are often the most comfortable events to attend. Everyone is attending for the same reason, and the event's sole focus is not business networking. It's an ancillary benefit of doing good.
- Develop an online network of colleagues with whom you can share all of the advantages cited in the first nine advantages. While worldwide is not local, it is the new networking. It is also easier for people who may be uncomfortable in a face-to-face setting. Just don't use it as a substitute for business networking in person.
- You will actually make friends. The people you meet when business networking have a lot in common with you. Pursue relationships with them for not just business advantages, but to share common interests and fun.
- Develop an online network of colleagues with whom you can share all of the advantages cited in the first nine. While worldwide is not local, it is the new networking. Networking has never been easier than now when you can almost instantaneously begin to build a far-flung network of professional people on online social networking sites such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter.
- It is also easier for people who may be uncomfortable in a face-to-face setting. Don't use online business networking as a substitute for business networking in person.



COMMANDMENTS OF BUSINESS NETWORKING

Networking at Events

- Identify where you should go. All venues are not right for all people. You owe it to yourself to do your research and find the venues that make sense for your business.
- Make a decision about which organizations. Decide the ones you should join and the ones you don't have to join in order to gain value from the events. For example, does it make sense to join a local chamber of commerce, or just go to the events that sound interesting and will most likely include people you should meet?
- Register for the event and schedule it like a business meeting. Many people either don't sign up for events or sign up for them and then forget to go.
- Determine how often you should be networking. How many times should you network in a given week, month or quarter? This will help you narrow down where you should be going.
- Develop open-ended questions. You can use these to ignite a conversation. Try to find unique questions. Don't ask the same old "so what do you do" question if you can help it.
- Attend events with a plan. Always try to learn something new. This will keep you from talking too much about yourself and your business.
- Prepare yourself physically and mentally for the event. Dress appropriately. Bring business cards. Turn your phone off or set it to vibrate. (I'm not kidding!)
- Don't forget to mingle. Are you going with someone? If so, split up once you get to the event.
- Get the lay of the land. When you arrive, step to the side. Take a deep breath and scan the room. This will give you a chance to regroup and focus before you approach anyone.
- Don't sit down right away. Wait until the program begins. If there is no program, you can sit once you've connected with someone.
- Try to sit with strangers. This is no time to stick with people you know.
- Be a good Samaritan. Is there someone sitting alone? Go to them and introduce yourself. You'll be saving their life! They are alone and nervous. You can even take them with you to mix and mingle with others.
- Don't give your business card to everyone you meet. Rather, give it to anyone who asks you for it.
- Do get the business card of everyone you meet.
- Have a firm (but not killer) handshake. Your handshake is a key indicator of your level of confidence. So think about what your handshake is saying to those you meet.
- Be present — always. When you are talking with someone, look them in the eye and really pay attention to what they are saying. You may learn something about them that tells you whether you can help them. It's also the only way you'll determine whether you should continue to get to know them after the event is over.
- Don't look around the room. And don't look over someone's shoulder when you are talking with them. It's rude. You are letting them know that you aren't really interested in them.
- Don't take phone calls. If you are expecting a call or have a situation that may need your attention, let the person you are talking with know there is the possibility you'll have to excuse yourself.



- Take necessary calls in private. Leave the room and go to a quiet place. It doesn't make you seem important if you take a call in the room. It makes you seem impolite, silly, rude, arrogant ... take your pick!
- Disengage politely. How do you get away from someone politely? There are a couple of tactics. You can tell them you don't want to monopolize their time. You can tell them you see someone you need to speak with. You can excuse yourself to go to the restroom. You can tell them you'd like to continue meeting people.
- Don't follow up via email. The only exception would be if you have been expressly asked to do so.
- Do at least send a note.
- Don't pitch too early. Quite frankly, don't "pitch" at all. When you build relationships it will become apparent to you and the other person when it makes sense to do business with each other. Remember, business networking is about relationships – not selling.
- Don't sign people up for your newsletter. Be sure you get their expressed permission before you put them on any kind of list.
- Don't assume. Just because you met someone doesn't give you license to gain a referral from them, use them as a resource, or give them your promotional and sales materials.
- Do err. But make it on the side of good manners and the golden rule.

Referral Groups

- Focus on giving. Networkers don't get referrals until people trust them. And they aren't trusted until they've been giving quality referrals for a while.
- Show up regularly and on time. When you show up late and/or infrequently, you send a message to your fellow group members: you tell them that you only care about yourself because you don't take the time to learn about their needs. You show them how you deal with business meetings and associates. Why would they trust you with their clients? How can they be sure you'll treat them well?
- Come prepared. Have a specific list of referral needs. The more specific you can be, the more referrals you'll receive.
- Always ask for what you need. You are never so busy that you don't need more prospects in our pipeline. If you don't ask all the time, you'll run the risk of getting to a place where you never ask. If you think it may be a couple of weeks before you'll be able to get to those referrals, just let the members know that. It's okay to ask when you are forthcoming with information.
- Focus on the group. Once again, be sure you are really listening to the needs of the group members. Don't play with your phone or answer emails while others are talking. Really listen and think about how you can help them.
- Meet with the members individually. Do this between meetings so you can get to know them better.
- Do not prospect among group members. You're not targeting your fellow group members when you have your one-on-one meetings with them. You're simply trying to build connections.



- Do not expect to get until you give.
- Do not expect to receive right away. It takes time to build those relationships with group members so you trust them and they trust you.
- Consider the other group members as resources to you and your contacts. When you know how they do business and you trust them, you can use them as resources when people mention needs those group members can solve. This can elevate you in the eyes of your contacts, prospects and clients.
- Do give quality referrals and leads. I knew a man who would write up a referral and put “Do not use my name” on the sheet. That is not helpful. I’ve also seen a situation where someone gave a referral but called the referee later and said, “Don’t call that person.” That’s not helpful! Don’t give garbage. It’s better to not give at all.
- Check with your clients, contacts and associates first. Are they open to you giving their names and contact information to your group members? One of the worst things that can happen is for you to refer a group member to a client, only to have the client get mad.
- Follow up! If someone gives you a referral, treat it like gold. You want to be sure that you follow up on it right away. Imagine how you’ll make the other person feel if they refer you to someone and you don’t follow up in a timely manner. It won’t make them want to refer you again. It takes time to build relationships with the people in your referral group. Don’t destroy that trust by failing to take a referral seriously.

Social Networking

- Decide who you want to be. Of course, you should be you! What I mean is that before you say something in your news feed or in a discussion, make sure it maps with how you want others to know you.
- Don’t spam. No one likes spam and that includes pitch messages on social networks. Use the platforms as a way to continue to build relationships and expand your network. Irritating people won’t help you accomplish that.
- Limit the self-promotion. You can let people know what you are up to as long as that’s not your only topic of conversation. When it comes to Facebook, you should only provide business-related posts on your business page. Your profile is your personal page and if you post too much about business, you may find people blocking you.
- Share information. People love to learn things. Use social networking as a way to share relevant information with other people. When you share your expertise on LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter and more, you show your relevancy and position yourself as a subject matter expert. Google will reward you for it and that will help you gain exposure.
- Tell people why you want to connect with them. Don’t use the standard connection script if you can help it. If they aren’t your closest friends, you want to give them a reason for accepting your connection request.
- Participate. You’ll get out of it what you put into it. That means you should be starting and participating in discussions, retweeting posts you like, commenting on posts, and sharing posts.



- Don't assume. Again, being connected to someone does not give you permission to pitch. Don't do it.
- Explain all requests for an introduction. Want an introduction? If you're seeking that through one of your contacts, make sure you explain why you want it.
- Treat your online connections as valuable. Your online connections are just as valuable as your offline connections. So don't forget that.
- Take the time to get to know them. When you engage in a conversation with someone, belong to a group with them or read something they wrote, ask them to connect directly. Then build the relationship. Remember that relationship building includes getting to know the other person, their business and their needs.
- Pay attention to the chatter. Social networking is just like in-person networking. You want to approach it as a way to learn things. When you pay attention to the chatter, the events, groups and conversations, you'll learn an awful lot about the people in your network. You'll also learn about people you should be connected to.
- Don't sell. This goes along with spamming and self-promotion. Sounds familiar, doesn't it? Of course it does. That's because social networking has nothing to do with selling. It has everything to do with building relationships so you can grow your business.
- Don't feel obligated. You can make decisions about who you connect with on different platforms. Just be consistent. If you decide that you don't want to be connected to business associates on Facebook, then don't be. If someone you don't know requests a connection to you, you are under no obligation to connect with them.
- Be as helpful as you can. Whenever you can connect people or help someone with a question jump in and do it.
- Let them know you're real. Don't hide behind a persona. Remember that people do business with people they trust. You have to be you in order for people to get to know you.
- Use your picture as a profile photo. No one does business with an avatar. And make sure the picture is the right kind for the platform. On LinkedIn you should be using a professional photo like a head shot. On Facebook you should use your logo on your business page. On your personal page you can use anything because it's personal. On Twitter a logo makes sense.
- Don't carry on private conversations in public. Use common sense and good judgment and contact people privately when you want to have a one-on-one conversation.
- Go to events — whenever possible. When an online group you are in has an in-person function, go to it. Meet the people with whom you've been interacting. It helps to build the relationship. Remember that you are still relationship building when you are face to face.
- Suggest a meeting. When you connect with someone via social networking, follow up and suggest a meeting. The meeting can be via phone Skype or in person, depending on geography. Don't let physical distance get in your way. In this day and age, it doesn't have to be a deterrent to growing a business relationship.
- Be approachable. I'm not going to get the chance to know you and like you if you are aloof. No one is so special that they are untouchable. Besides, who would want to build a relationship with someone distant?



Although increased sales is the end goal, don't participate in business networking to sell. Find and develop relationships with people you can help and who can help you. When we detach ourselves from the emphasis we tend to put on selling, we actually improve our ability to build relationships. The sales will come naturally from there.

Links

<https://www.businessballs.com/building-relationships/networking/>

<https://www.fastcompany.com/3033662/how-to-start-a-networking-group-that-will-actually-work>

<https://www.thebalancesmb.com/business-networking-tips-2948378>