

18 Business Networking Tips

Business Networking events are taking off. Its an activity that has proven to be tremendously popular and one that delivers solid benefits in terms of business efficiency and hard cash returns.

In this article, we look at 18 tips for would be and practicing business networkers, we hope you enjoy them and get to use them before too long...

- 1. Be Prepared.** Wherever you go whether it's a network event or not, make sure you have a good supply of current business cards with you. Having been caught out on more than one occasion, I now make sure that the cards I have are the latest ones with the correct and current contact details. On this same subject, it's not a bad idea to have a name badge with your details especially when you are attending an event of any kind. It is worthwhile investing in a laminated or plastic printed version.
- 2. Sales Material.** If you have any flyers or other sales material, take a supply along with you. What I'm thinking of here is a flyer that advertises a current special offer or just one that gives more details about your business. You never know when the opportunity might arise to meet one of the 'Magnificent Seven' Network types.
- 3. Build the Relationship.** In Networking it's all about building relationships and not selling in the traditional sense of the word. Your network contacts are there to help you find more customers or to improve your business performance in other ways. You need to nurture these relationships, it's more like farming than the 'Hunter/Gatherer' approach of selling. Relationship builders take a genuine interest in their contacts because they see the real value in the business relationship.
- 4. Build Your List.** Keep adding new contacts to your list and remember to properly segment them by the 7 types of contact. Keep your list up to date and enter any changes, this includes when a contact moves employment you should find out who is new in the job and where your old contact went to. In August 2004, I had around 100 people on my lists. 10 months later I had met and spoken with more than 2000 businesses throughout Australia. I now have close to that number on my newsletter list and a database of a further 1700 Key Contacts.
- 5. The First Impression.** You have seconds to make that first impression, make the seconds count with a well rehearsed ten second and then later the thirty second introduction. Project a positive image, confident and knowledgeable about your business and your products. My ten second intro is *'My name is Gordon Cramer and I work with Small to Medium Businesses to improve their revenues and profitability.'* The thirty second version is, *'When we work with a business we take a real interest in what they do. For example, I recently met two businesses who were in the same field but were not competition for each other. I organized an introduction such that the two now work together with one producing raw materials and the other providing and organizing processing, transport and specialized packaging. As a bonus the service provider introduced the producer to a ready made distributor for the finished goods. The result was considerable savings for the producer plus a new market and additional income for the other two businesses.'*
- 6. Be in it for the Long Haul.** Building solid business relationships takes time. It may be twelve months or more before some relationships start to produce results but in the interim those 'apparently 'Dormant' contacts could still be spreading the good word on your business especially if you have them on your newsletter list.

7. **What can they Do Not Who Do they Know.** An important distinction, take an interest in your contact and find what it is that they can do to help your business now. If you start to ask for contacts from them they will feel that you are using them up and you will risk losing what could be a very valuable network contact.
8. **A Two Way Street.** Business Networking is a Two Way Street, be prepared to help promote your contacts business as well as your own. Do something for your contacts, send them a new contact, write an article and mention them in it or if you are in the position to do it, publish one of their articles in your newsletter.
9. **Value every Business Card.** Save them and keep them in order, they are one of your businesses biggest assets.
10. **Follow up with every New Contact.** Whether its an email or a hand written note, make the effort to formally follow up with a message that says thanks and suggests that you should meet up at a later date to discuss business opportunities. Two weeks later, organize that meeting, have a coffee somewhere and get down to business.
11. **Give your self some Visibility.** Good exposure can be inexpensive especially if its on the web. I recently sent in a press release to www.prweb.com and they published the article that went out to 130000 people world wide. The result was that the number of visitors to my web site sky rocketed and more than 800 online and offline newsletters published the story. I now have 2700 sites that give a reference to Actif Communications on Google. Simultaneously I made the first page on Google, MSN and Yahoo for two months running and at the time of writing this, I still have a 1st page ranking on Yahoo. On this same subject, submit regular articles directly to local and national press as well as to other businesses newsletters. It may take a while but they will eventually publish for you.
12. **Organise Micro Networking Meetings.** Every month or so, organize a breakfast meeting with your top ten Network contacts, share the costs. It will pay dividends.
13. **Remember your Customer Network.** Every now and then send your customers something for nothing. It may be a lottery ticket or perhaps a bookmark. It does not have to be expensive. In my case I write ebooks and send out complimentary copies or I produce an online interactive tutorial on some aspect of business and give my customers free access from our web site.
14. **5 New Contacts a Day.** Sounds tough, but it isn't really. Think about the number of people that you know and give them a call, sell them on receiving your newsletter and add them to your list. It gets easier when your web site starts attracting new visitors from your PR efforts, you will find that people will sign up for your newsletter that way.
15. **Develop Ten Mentor contacts.** Make a point of finding ten experienced business operators who can act as Mentors and your unofficial Advisory Board'. Apart from the invaluable advice they can give you, they can also introduce you to other businesses and other networks.
16. **Networking Events are Important.** Don't underestimate the value of networking. Show up and meet people, let them know who you are and what you do. The event doesn't have to be in your area, travel to some and be amazed at the contacts you will meet there who can be of help for your business.

17. Focus on Relevant Contacts. That is not to say that you should ignore the possibilities from contacts that are apparently unconnected with your business. It is advice to make sure that you avoid time wasters and tire kickers.

18. What do You Need in Your Business? Make a list of the things that you need in your business, prioritise it and set about finding contacts, maybe even through your contacts, who can help you.

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