



Networking for Fun & Profit

How to get the most out of networking events

Networking events can work for both business-to-consumer (B-to-C) and business-to-business (B-to-B) companies. Some of these events have a theme; such as industry (hospitality firms), descriptive (marketing firms), or location (businesses on the west side of town). Your local business press should print the networking groups in your area along with the day, time and location of their meetings. Many networking groups are local, while others are national lead exchange groups such as Le Tip and BNI.

When you go to a networking event, there are several tips that can help make the experience more productive for you.

- 1) **Pick the right events.** Make sure you research what the purpose and goal is of the event you will be attending. If the attendees don't include companies or people who could buy from you or, more importantly, their customers don't match your customer profiles, then don't go. If you sell marketing services, avoid attending events for manufacturing people. You also want to make sure you have something in common with the other attendees.
- 2) **Don't be shy.** Take the initiative to start conversations with other attendees by asking a lot of questions about what they do, who their clients are, how long they've been doing it, how long they lived in town, etc.
- 3) **Listen well.** Be a good listener and pay attention to what is being said as well as how it is being said.
- 4) **Arrive early.** This will help you get a lay of the land and to establish conversations early on with others who have just arrived. If you come later, everyone may already be engaged in a conversation with someone else and it may not be as easy for you to join in.
- 5) **Avoid people you know.** The goal of a networking event is to meet new people. Spending time with people you already know defeats the purpose.
- 6) **Only the lonely.** It's a bit challenging to break into a conversation with a group of people (although you should try this in a polite way, nevertheless). So look for other attendees who are alone and not already engaged in a conversation. They'll welcome you and your conversation because nothing is worse than standing alone at an event where you're supposed to be mingling and conversing.
- 7) **Food is your friend.** Hang around the food since that's where most people at these events eventually go. Talk to people while you're in line. Take just a few pieces of food at a time so that you have an excuse to keep returning to the buffet. Take your plate to a table or crowd with a lot of people and introduce yourself. Talk a bit, listen a lot, and keep getting up for more (small portions of) food. This will allow you to mingle and meet more people in a more comfortable, and perhaps less intimidating, fashion.

- 8) **Take, don't give.** Try not to give out your business card unless someone asks for it. This way, if they ask for it you'll know they actually want it. On the other hand, take as many cards as you can, provided they are from people you want to follow up with, have customers you'll want to meet, or have a reason to stay in touch with and build a relationship.
- 9) **Take notes.** When someone gives you their card, write a short note on the back about what you discussed so you'll remember when you follow up.
- 10) **Follow up.** Always follow up with the people you meet at a networking event. A simple email the next day telling them what a pleasure it was to meet them and thanking them for their time is all that's needed.
- 11) **Don't be a snob.** Invite people into your conversations. Don't appear to be cliquish by ignoring strangers. Be gracious as this will present a positive impression of you. And, don't judge a book by its cover. You never know who someone really is and if they will someday need your services, or know someone else who will.
- 12) **Don't Sell!!!** Networking events are not an invitation for you to sell your stuff. You are building relationships and your goal is to get these people, with whom you will eventually (hopefully) build a trusting relationship, to refer you to their clients or even give you their client's names for you to contact. If a person you meet at one of these events is interested in what you do, they will let you know. Don't try selling here; else you will be avoided like the plague.
- 13) **General comments.** Dress professionally. Don't drink too much. Don't make a pig of yourself at the buffet. Don't sell (see point #12). Don't act like a fool. Don't do all these obvious things you wouldn't normally do in front of a customer and that I shouldn't even have to mention here. But remember, I've seen it all, so it always helps to be thorough.

Networking events can be fun, informative and very beneficial to your lead generating efforts. Make the most of them, but remember that the main goal of these events is to build relationships with other members so that you can refer each other to your customers, not to use them to sell to.

Note: This article was an excerpt from Russ Lombardo's latest book, "CyberSelling – Using CRM Technology to Help You Sell." For more information, check out www.CyberSellingBook.com.

Good luck and good selling!

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