

How to Profit From Networking

Sales are frequently developed through the relationships we have created with other people. Networking functions provide the opportunity to expand our contact list, particularly when we create and nurture quality relationships. It is not enough to visit a networking group, talk to dozens of people and gather as many business cards possible. However, every networking function has tremendous potential for new business leads. Here are five strategies to make networking profitable:

1. Choose the right networking group or event. The best results come from attending the appropriate networking events for your particular industry. This should include trade shows, conferences, and associations dedicated to your type of business. For example, if your target market is a Fortune 500 company, it does not make sense to join a group whose primary membership consists of individual business owners. You can also participate in groups where your potential clients meet. A friend of mine helps people negotiate leases with their landlords. He joined the local franchise association because most franchisors lease their properties.

2. Focus on quality contacts versus quantity. Most people have experienced the person who, while talking to you, keeps his eyes roving around the room, seeking his next victim. This individual is more interested in passing out and collecting business cards than establishing a relationship. My approach is to make between two and five new contacts at each networking meeting I attend. Focus on the quality of the connection and people will become much more trusting of you.

3. Make a positive first impression. You have EXACTLY one opportunity to make a great first impression. Factors that influence this initial impact are your handshake, facial expressions, eye contact, interest in the other person and your overall attentiveness. Develop a great handshake, approach people with a natural, genuine smile and make good eye contact. Notice the colour of the other person's eyes as you introduce yourself. Listen carefully to their name. If you don't hear them or understand exactly what they say, ask them to repeat it. Many people do not speak clearly or loudly enough and others are very nervous at networking events. Make a powerful impression by asking them what they do before talking about yourself or your business. As Stephen Covey states, *"Seek first to understand and then to be understood."* Comment on their business, ask them to elaborate, or have them explain something in more detail. As they continue, make sure you listen intently to what they tell you. Once you have demonstrated interest in someone else, they will – in most cases – become more interested in you. When that occurs, follow the step outline in the next point.

4. Be able to clearly state what you do. Develop a ten second introduction as well as a thirty second presentation. The introduction explains what you do and for whom. For example; *"I work with boutique retailers to help them increase their sales and profits."* This introduction should encourage the other person to ask for more information. When they do, you recite your thirty second presentation. *"Bob Smith of High Profile Clothing wanted a program that would help his sales managers increase their sales. After*

working with them for six months we achieved a 21.5 percent increase in sales. Plus, sales of their premium line of ties have doubled in this time frame.” As you can see, this gives an example of your work and the typical results you have help your clients achieve. Each of these introductions needs to be well-rehearsed so you can recite them at any time and under any circumstance. You must be genuine, authentic, and as I recently heard a speaker say, “bone-dry honest.”

5. Follow up after the event. In my experience, most people drop the ball here. Yet the follow-up is the most important aspect of networking. There are two specific strategies to follow:

First, immediately after the event – typically the next day – you should send a handwritten card to the people you met. Mention something from your conversation and express your interest to keep in contact. Always include a business card in your correspondence.

Next, within two weeks, contact that person and arrange to meet for coffee or lunch. This will give you the opportunity to learn more about their business, the challenges they face, and how you could potentially help them. This is NOT a sales call – it is a relationship building meeting.

Networking does product results. The more people know about you and your business, and the more they trust you, the greater the likelihood they will either work with you or refer someone else to you.

Copyright 2003 Kelley Robertson, all rights reserved.

Kelley Robertson, President of the Robertson Training Group, works with businesses to help them increase their sales and motivate their employees. He is also the author of “Stop, Ask & Listen – Proven sales techniques to turn browsers into buyers.” Visit his website at www.RobertsonTrainingGroup.com and receive a FREE copy of “100 Ways to Increase Your Sales” by subscribing to his 59-Second Tip, a free weekly e-zine.