

Title:

Work Your Network

Word Count:

914

Summary:

Are you finding that your networking efforts are wearing you out - and your network does not seem to be growing? Here are the myths that must be dispelled so that you can spend quality time - not quantity time - on building your professional network.

Keywords:

networking, contact building, list building, small business sales, business development

Article Body:

If you're networking with strangers, you're wasting your time. A consultant friend of mine recently complained, "I'm doing 2-3 networking events a week - and I'm worn out." When I asked why she felt networking was important, she replied, "One of my marketing goals is to do at least 1 networking event a week." (I pointed out that she just admitted to doing 2-3 a week - and perhaps doing 1 a week is smart and doing triple that goal is causing some of the fatigue.) But there's much more to the great American business myth of networking.

Myth 1: The more you network, the more effective your networking activities become.

Truth 1: It's much more important to become well-known in 1-2 circles than to spread your networking activities over many different groups. Depth beats breadth every time.

I then asked her how networking was working for her. She said, "I don't think I have gotten a shred of business out of it in the last six months." Her rationale for doing networking: "Everybody knows that you build a business by networking!" Does this make any sense? Or worse, does it sound familiar?

See if this networking scenario has happened to you:

You meet someone for 30 seconds. They mumble something about real estate as you

are tuning them out. They ask you what you do, and you say you are in insurance. After 10 seconds of staring blankly at each other, you both head to the celery sticks for lack of anything better to do.

Myth 2: The cocktails and miniature wiener circuit is the way to network to success

Truth 2: Networking with strangers to build business is about as effective as going to a bar to get married. In the words of Dr. Phil, "It simply ain't gonna happen that way."

Here's why you're not going to meet your business soul mate at a networking event:

- 1) You aren't going to do business with someone after meeting them for a few minutes and getting handed a poorly printed card.
- 2) Businesses are built on relationships and not "30-second commercials," no matter how effective and intriguing.
- 3) Most of us have major trouble in explaining what we do, much less getting past that explanation and listening for what prospects need.
- 4) Networking with strangers is not targeted or specific and in fact is completely random. For some people, networking is exactly as effective as cold calling, which is the least effective marketing tool there is.

So am I saying that networking is a waste of time? Absolutely not. What I'm saying is you need to start networking smarter.

Here are a few thoughts to jog your noggin:

- \* Network by having coffee or lunch with people one on one. Get to know them and their business. They may become a prospect, alliance partner, or referral source. But aim first and foremost to make them a friend. The rest will follow naturally.
- \* If you're going to network with strangers, go with the goal of making 2-3 lunch or coffee dates with people you find interesting.
- \* Ask every happy customer you have (they're all happy, right?) for just one referral of someone who would be interested in your type of goods or services, then call and use their name. ("Hi I'm Fred and Ginger said I should call you.

Isn't Ginger great?") You already have one thing in common - Ginger!

\* Create a network "hit list" of the exact kind of businesses you want to network with - maybe you sell software and you want to meet IT managers at medium-size companies. Make the list and put it in your little black book or PDA. Focus your networking and outreach activities on only those people - or others who can refer you to those people.

\* Join non-business groups and spend time doing non-business activities: Civic, social, religious, recreational, musical, athletic... the list is endless. Establish relationships with people in your group. Perhaps you're a Moose and a realtor. A Moose, as it turns out, wants to buy a house from another Moose. If so, you have the Moose Market cornered! Are you into hand-drumming. Guess what? A hand-drummer will want to do business with another hand-drummer. Get it?

\* If you do go to a "mixer" go with a targeted goal in mind. For example, your goal might be "to meet three people on my target list and get their card so I can follow up for breakfast, lunch, coffee or badminton." A traditional "networking event" now becomes simply the first phase of your targeted plan for global domination, and not an end in itself.

Here's a final thought to shake up your networking mindset: Network with people who already know you, like you, or have done business with you.

Myth 3: Networking is all about getting more people to know what you do.

Truth 3: Networking is all about getting people that already know you to share opportunities where you can be helpful to each other.

Make 2-3 phone calls a day to connect with people from past jobs, former clients, or influential people who have expressed interest in you in the past.

We all have a "fan base" that we grossly underutilize.

Think about tapping into friends, colleagues, mentors, and family to mine the connections you already have at your fingertips.

So get out there and network - but make it worth your investment of time and energy by networking smart. As your mother always said, "Don't network with strangers."