

Marketing Insights

Tips to boost your business

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6504 28th St. SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49546
616-222-2937 phone
info@cascadeprint.com
www.cascadeprint.com

How to be Really Successful at Networking

by Gary Horsman

Networking and word-of-mouth marketing has become an essential business skill. We tend to intuitively realize this. However, how well do we do it? Do we set goals and objectives like we do for other business projects and marketing initiatives? When I speak with other business professionals, I find that most fully realize the value and power of networking but that they often have a haphazard approach to networking. Here are some thoughts and advice on how to be spectacularly effective as a networking professional.

Imagine that you are getting spectacular networking results.

What would that mean? What goals would you have achieved? Who would you be networking with? What problems would these spectacular networking results be solving? These are important questions and your networking activity should be based on the answers to these questions.

Have you ever gone to a networking event and mingled around a bit, talked to a few people and then left? These results were certainly less than spectacular. Have you left without any appointments? Have you left after getting only a few business cards from people to follow up with or perhaps even none? Have you left without even the thought of following up with anyone? If so then you have wasted your time attending the event.

I suggest an approach at a networking event that is virtually guaranteed to boost up your networking to the spectacular level.

Here is what I suggest:

Don’t even think about trying to sell at a networking event. Focus on building your network. Focus on helping others to build their network or to help others reach people that could use their product or service. In short, help others. If you try to sell at the event then you are playing a hit or miss game. If people do not need or want what you are selling you have no chance to make a sale and if you continue to try then you will only turn people off and they will close up to you. This is the last thing you want to have happen. It is a rare networking event that gives to the opportunity to sell and I hope that this is not news to you.

Imagine changing your thoughts about networking into ones of building your network rather than ones where you try to make a sale. What would happen if you changed your approach in networking from “selling”, to getting to know as many people as possible, and then getting them to introduce you to someone who can use your product?

People usually respond well to anyone who will help them achieve what they want. So, shouldn’t you be trying to find out how you can help as many people as possible? Become their referral source. If you help them they will respond in kind by helping you reach more people. Learn how to help the people you meet.

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“Network with people that think like you do.”

“Building a network is the same as building a relationship. Always keep this in mind.”

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Once you have replaced the “selling” attitude with the “helping” attitude. You are ready to move onto the next phase. This is where things can really get interesting. Now it is time to focus on networking with the right people. For spectacular results, you need to be networking with the right people.

What are the characteristics of the right people - the right people for you?

Network with people that think like you do. They are not there to sell but rather to help others and to expand their network.

Network with people that are good at helping others.

Network with people that know the people you want to do business with.

Get together with people that know lots of other people. For example, business leaders usually know lots of other people and they know other business leaders.

Where do you find these people?

Choose events where networking is not only expected but encouraged.

Join a networking group. One such group is BNI. BNI is a formalized networking organization and the focus is to not sell to the group but rather to increase a member's network and to generate sales outside of the group.

Attend networking events where everyone is not trying to sell to everyone else.

At an event observe people that appear to know many other people. These people have dedicated significant time to building their network. They can be extremely helpful once you get to know them.

If an event has a host or people to help with introductions then ask to be introduced to the people you want to meet. Remember that you want to meet people that can help you build your network. You want to meet with people that you can help by expanding their network.

Always be on the lookout for “Power Networkers”. Power Networkers are the people with all the right characteristics.

How do you meet these people?

Building a network is the same as building a relationship. Always keep this in mind.

Ask to be introduced and then make a genuine effort to learn about the other person. If you cannot be introduced then introduce yourself. Always be genuine and learn about the other person.

Make arrangements to meet again to find out how you can help that person with network building. As long as you remain on target about helping the other person you soon enough will be asked how you can be helped with referrals for business or to expand your network. This activity powers up this relationship and it benefits both parties.

Set goals for a networking event. For example, have a goal to meet 10 people and come away with two follow-up lunches or two follow-up meetings.

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Do not be too quick to offer referrals. Protect your contacts and only refer when you know more about the people you have just met. This is why a follow up meeting is so important. Show an interest in learning more about the other person, the products and services and their ideal clients.

Offer to meet on a specific problem they may have mentioned to you. Again, if you approach this with the intent to help the post-event meetings will be easier to arrange.

Some Ideas on How to Maintain Your Network

Set up a way to stay in touch.

Use e-mail to send ideas and additional networking thoughts and tips.

If you publish a newsletter then put your new contacts on your distribution list after asking their permission.

Once you get to know them better send a note or card on their birthday. Birthdays are often ignored and you can stand out by being the one that has remembered. Also, note that people are flooded with Christmas and Holiday cards. It is harder to stand out from the rest by sending a card during the holidays.

If you find an interesting article cut it out and send it with a short note. This simple act goes a long way.

For people that you want to get to know better invite them out to lunch.

Invite them to networking events and ask them to invite you to networking events. At these events help them with introductions and they will help you when you go to their events.

Final Comments

Business building activities take time and attention. Building relationships does not happen over night and with no activity. You get from a relationship what you put into it. What levels do you need to achieve? My studies indicate that in order to have a nice network operating for you that you will need somewhere between 80 and 120 people that you maintain regular contact with. At this level, this channel will be a major part of your marketing. You will be able to count on it for significant business.

The bigger your network the more it will perform for you and if you will be able to maintain proper contact with 300 or 400 people then I suggest that you will not have to do any other marketing as your network will be big enough to provide you will all the business you can handle.

So stop selling at networking events, and start building your network. Go to networking events most conducive to network building (rather than selling events).

Set specific goals for networking events relative to people to meet, types of people to meet and follow-up meetings made.

Gary Horsman is President of WSI Global Reach which is an Internet Marketing company located in Woodstock, Vermont. He is a member of BNI – an international networking organization - and has contributed to his BNI Chapter as Vice President, Educational Coordinator and is currently the Chapter Mentor and a Visitor Host. He also serves as an Ambassador for BNI New Hampshire. Ambassadors help BNI Chapters to achieve their objectives. He firmly believes in helping other achieve their goals.