

HANDOUT FROM A PRESENTATION ON NETWORKING

BY RAY BUSHELL,

GENERAL MANAGER, HANDLE WITH CARE LIMITED

SOWTON FORUM MEMBER'S MEETING

FRIDAY 8TH DECEMBER 2006

"NETWORKING - THE BASICS"

CONTENTS

Introduction	3
What is Networking?.....	4
Why should I Network?.....	4
Types of networking Groups.....	5
Advantages of Networking.....	6
Disadvantages of Networking.....	6
Tips for face-to-face Networking.....	7
Following up with contacts.....	10
Networking with Referral Partners.....	11
Networking on the Web.....	14
Popular choices for Networking venues.....	15
Summary of key points.....	17
Networking Groups.....	18
Further Reading.....	20
Contact information.....	22

INTRODUCTION TO NETWORKING AND REFERRAL BUILDING

Whether you are in business yourself, thinking of going into business or representing your company or organisation, Networking will be an important aspect of how you communicate with contacts.

This presentation aims to explain what Networking is, who should do it, why and - more importantly - how.

Although Networking covers many aspects of contact, this presentation primarily deals with "face-to-face" Networking. This subject could span a whole day, therefore in the short time allowed, the object of the exercise will be to introduce you to the basics of networking, or in the case of the more "seasoned networkers" act as an refresher. It is highly doubtful that the session will make you an "expert", but rather intended to arm you with some basic knowledge to give you the confidence to get out there and network. Practice makes perfect, as they say.

It is hoped that the presentation will have answered most of your basic questions, however this handout should cover any queries you may still have. This handout should be used as guide for you to refer to, when considering your approach to Networking. If you still have questions that you feel have not been addressed in this handout, please feel free to contact me, using the details on page 22. Further reading details are also enclosed.

WHAT IS NETWORKING?

Networking is another word to describe using face-to-face contact to establish relationships that can lead to business. Of course, the term networking can equally apply to using email or the Internet to build relationships with people. For the purpose of this exercise, we shall concentrate on face-to-face contact, which is the epitome of "word of mouth" marketing.

Don't limit your picture of what networking means to circulating through a room exchanging business cards. A broader view of networking is creating a pool of contacts from which you can draw clients, referrals, resources, ideas and information. When you go to a networking event, you may meet prospective customers, and you will also make other valuable contacts. Just as you would follow up with a prospect by placing a call or suggesting lunch, you can build your network of colleagues and referral patterns in the same way.

You don't have to wait around for word of mouth to build in order to start getting referrals. You can seek out potential referral partners by identifying people who are in contact with your target market and getting to know them. After an initial meeting or conversation, you can stay in touch using some of the same tactics as shown for direct contact or follow-up, plus these tactics are more specific to networking and referral building.

WHY SHOULD I NETWORK?

Whether you are selling a product or service, or representing your company or organisation, you need to communicate what business you are in and how you can address other people's needs. Building business is building relationships. Networking is an important part of that relationship building process. People do business with people. People like to do business with people they know, like and trust. Networking is vital if you are to build up trust with a potential client. Networking is a two way process, whereby you will come into contact with people who may be able to help your business. Additionally, you may refer someone you met whilst networking and refer them to one of your existing clients, (or clients of the organisation you work for), who may have need of their service. Ultimately, however, you are hoping that YOU will be referred to someone else, who may have need of YOUR product or service - and before you know it, a client is born!

TYPES OF NETWORKING GROUPS

You can network just about anywhere. Family and friends are the oldest networks of all and have helped launch many a business.

However, there are other groups, which you should be aware of:

- *Business Organisations* - These organisations are a rich source of potential for networking. They could include such organisations as Business Link, Chamber of Commerce, FSB, etc
- *Leads Clubs* - These organisations exist for the sole purpose of generating business leads and referrals for its members. An example of such a club would be BNI (Business Network International), who have "chapters" in most major towns. (See examples of leads clubs at the end of this brief).
- *Community Service Clubs* - These clubs are dedicated to performing public service for various causes through fund raising events and volunteer activities. Examples of these are: The Buffs, The Rotary Club etc. Although overt networking is discouraged, "informal" networking can still be very effective. In the process of giving back something to the community, you can meet other business contacts in your area that could provide valuable contacts and that could lead to future business relationships.
- *Professional Associations* - These associations are a vital way to establish relationships with other colleagues who are in your (or a similar) line of business. This networking can be done at local, regional or national level. They enable you to keep up to date with developments, provide support and permit "overload exchanges".
- *On Line Networking Groups* - More and more networking is being done over the internet and allow you to join interest groups, chat with people over bulletin boards, access email and "attend" conferences - at any time of the day or night!

ADVANTAGES & DISADVANTAGES

As with most things, there are advantages and disadvantages. Below is a brief summary of some of the pros and cons of networking:

ADVANTAGES:

- Allows you to convey an interest in a prospective client's needs
- Prospects have a chance to discover what you do and perhaps solve their problem
- Prospects have a chance to get to like you
- Ideal for selling "others" - which in turn will mean someone is doing the same about you.
- You will gradually get yourself and your business known throughout the business community.
- Provides visibility, which leads to familiarity, which leads to credibility.
- Opportunity to make new friends
- Allows you to do business with people you know and trust (or have been recommended) and who also know and trust you.
- The more people you keep in touch with, the more likely they will turn into customers and clients.

DISADVANTAGES

- Can be time consuming
- Done poorly, can be a waste of time
- Usually a long lead in time before business transpires
- Requires consistency
- Can be daunting to start
- Requires identifying the right forum/event.

TIPS FOR FACE TO FACE NETWORKING

- **Arrive at meetings and group activities at least 15 minutes early. Always attend the social part before the programme starts. This is usually the time when most networking takes place. Once the programme starts, there is usually little time for networking**
- **10 second introduction.**
Your 10 second introduction is what you say when you shake someone's hand, call someone on the phone. Or stand up in front of a group. It describes what you do, who you do it for in a clear and memorable way. One effective format is the benefits-orientated introduction, where you state the key benefit of your service before giving your occupation or job title. Here are some examples:

“My name is Chris Brown. I teach business owners and sales people to make more money with less effort. I'm a business coach. The name of the company is Aspire”

I'm Susan Taylor, and I help real people get dressed. My business is A Personal Design Service, and I'm a professional style consultant”.

The advantage of this format is that it positions you in the mind of the listeners before they have a chance to form their own opinions about what you do. If you introduce yourself as an attorney, for example, you listener may think you carry out commercial litigation, or conveyancing, or insolvency, or criminal law, none of which may help you get clients, if you do family law. An introduction that begins “I work with people going through divorce to help them get what they're entitled to” is both specific and memorable.

Notice that all these introductions use plain language rather than industry jargon. Unless you know exactly who your listeners are and what vernacular they speak, use terms a 12 year old would understand.

- **Business cards.** To be effective, they must specifically state what you do, but not contain a laundry list of your talents. Don't list multiple businesses on the same card.

- **Stop waiting for something to happen. Don't approach these meetings as a "guest" waiting to be introduced. Greet people. Strike up a conversation. Smile and extend your hand. People will smile back and introduce themselves. If not, say something like, " I don't think we've met". Initiate little conversations by asking questions like " What do you do?", "How did you hear about this event?" Don't mill around waiting for something to happen!**
- **Always use your "This is what I do" line. Don't be shy or timid when doing this. Say it with a smile on your face. This is the one time you have the opportunity to blow your own horn. Show pride in who you are and what you do. A shy timid voice saying "I...er...have a bookkeeping service", will hardly inspire your prospect to have any confidence in you - even if you happen to be the best bookkeeper around. If you are not confident, you can be assured your clients won't be either.**
- **Carry a stash of business cards at all times. Sounds obvious, but you would be surprised how many people forget or run out of their own business cards. Keep them handy. One tip is to keep the cards you receive in one pocket and your cards that you will give in another.**
- **Get a business card from every appropriate contact you make. This allows you to follow up by calling your contacts later. One of the main reasons for giving your business card is to get the cards of others in return. Don't wait for those you want to speak to, to contact you - take the initiative and contact them.**
- **Have a pen or pencil handy. Don't rely on memory. Write notes on the cards you receive about what you want to discuss with them in the future.**
- **Make your nametag work for you. - Don't just put your first name on your nametag. Write your full name and company in large, clear letters. Wear your tag on your right side so people can easily read it when they shake hands with you.**
- **Concentrate on talking with one person at a time. A roving eye is a huge sin in networking. You hardly want to appear**

disinterested, bored or unfocussed by the person you are talking to, because you are busy trying to catch the eye of someone else to talk to. Don't rush madly from one person to another. Over the long term you will do far better talking sincerely with a few people. Once you feel the social interaction has gone the full circle, feel free to move on and talk with other people. A good closure may be "I've enjoyed meeting you", "I'll look forward to seeing you at future meetings", or "Let's talk later", or "Excuse me, I see someone I need to speak with. It's been a pleasure talking with you".

- Stay approximately 15 minutes after the event. Don't just rush off. Exchange cards with anyone you meet earlier and wrap up any previously unfinished conversations. Take time to say good-bye. However, don't hang around forever!
- End the conversation with a commitment. Before you leave communicate an action you will take: "I'll send you that information", or "I'll call you with so-and-so's number", or "I'll see you here next time." Don't let one conversation go on too long.
- Write down what you said you would do. As soon as you walk away, note any promise you made on the back of the person's card. Also note anything you want to remember about the conversation. Later you won't be able to recall what was said.
- Follow up with a phone call, meeting, or note. If someone you met expressed an interest in doing business you, you need to follow up immediately. Telephone or drop a line the next day to arrange a meeting. If appropriate send a brochure with your note. Include information about your recent activities.

FOLLOWING UP WITH CONTACTS

If you don't follow up with the people you meet, you are wasting your time in meeting them. It is simply untrue that someone will call you when they have a need for you. The truth is that if they have met you only once, they probably don't even remember you, and it's even less likely that they will remember where they put your card.

In this key area, marketing truly is telling people what you do, over and over. This focuses on the follow - up immediately with people you meet at an event.

Take all those business cards out of your pocket and sort them into three piles: Prospective clients, useful network contacts, and other. Now sort the current pile into hot, warm and cold leads.

Stop right there and follow up with all hot and warm leads. Call each one on the phone, re-introduce yourself, and try to make a presentation or get an appointment. If directly soliciting business is inappropriate in your profession (Psychotherapy, for example), you can still make contact, perhaps on a nice to meet you note.

When you get a voice mail or if someone requests more information, send a letter with a fact sheet or brochure. Put the person on your calendar for the next follow-up.

Next, go to the networking contacts and sort them into two piles: people who can directly lead to prospective clients and people who can lead you to other marketing opportunities, such as a new networking group or a speaking engagement. Stop and follow-up with the people who might have leads for you. Call them to suggest coffee or lunch, or offer to stop by the office.

You should now have stacks of cards left, cold clients leads, people who can lead you to marketing opportunities, and other. If you are short on time or have other hot leads in the pipeline, send those cold leads a nice-to-meet-you note, and tuck them away in your contact management system in case you need them later. If the new marketing opportunities fit into current plans, go ahead and call those people. Otherwise treat them like the cold leads.

And those other cards? Thrown them away. If they aren't worth following up with, they don't belong in your contacts management system.

- Always send a thank you note to anyone who sends you a referral. When someone has sent you a referral send a card. If the referral is particularly profitable, give that person an additional acknowledgement - by taking the person to dinner.

REMEMBER: THE MORE YOU GIVE, THE MORE YOU'LL GET!

NETWORKING WITH REFERRAL PARTNERS

A referral partner is a person, group or institution willing to refer potential clients to you. Building relationships with referral partners can be a powerful way to fill your marketing pipeline. If enough people begin referring business to you, you will eventually achieve the enviable position of being able to respond to a client inquiry instead of having to initiate contact yourself.

A prospective client who is referred to you is much more likely to buy what you have to sell than someone who hasn't been referred. The endorsement of the person making the referral carries a lot of weight, increasing the know-like-and trust factor immediately. Referred prospects are less likely to shop for the lowest price, ask fewer questions about your background and expertise, and typically come to a decision much more quickly. If soliciting business is inappropriate in your profession, referrals may be your primary source of clients.

For all these reasons, concentrating some effort on building referrals can be a very worthwhile use of your time. Whilst some of the best referrals come from past clients, there are many other possible referral partners for any business.

Possible referral partners.

Other prospects. People you have spoken to or met with but aren't ready to buy from you now will still refer you to others, if you remember to keep in touch with them.

Colleagues. Others in your field can be excellent referral sources. If you offer non-competitive services, you may even approach prospective clients together.

Competitors. Don't rule out competitors as referral partners. You may have an area of speciality that they don't. They may also have times when they can't handle all the business that comes to them or can't take on a particular client because of a conflict of interest.

Others who serve your market. Anyone who is in regular contact with your target market is a potential referral partner, regardless of the field. A computer network installer might easily collect referrals from the owner of a removals company, a commercial property manager, or a security systems sales person - all people who might know about a forthcoming office relocation.

Sales people. Regardless of what they sell, salespeople are used to the process of giving and receiving referrals. If you make friends with someone who sells for a living, he or she will naturally be on the lookout for possible leads for you. Start with the salespeople who sell to you.

Centres of influence. These are the people everyone seems to know. You see them at networking events, read their names in the trade press, and hear their names mentioned everywhere. People like this get asked for referrals all the time, so you want your name to be in their contact management system.

Organisations. When a prestigious non-profit or educational institution refers you, it is an implied endorsement and makes you very attractive to prospective customers. Building relationships with organizations like this typically requires volunteering your professional services or teaching for them.

To begin identifying potential referral partners, develop a list of categories that represents the type of people or groups that you think would be good candidates. For example, if you were an

executive recruiter specialising in start-ups and rapidly growing small companies your referral categories might be.

- Accountants who serve this market
- Solicitors specializing in stock offerings, contacts, patents, trade marks and other relevant areas.
- Business development consultants
- Human resources management consultants.

When you have identified some promising categories, look through your existing contacts to see who fits. Call those people up, and say, "You know, I think we may be able to help each other get more clients. Can we get together and talk about it?" After you have contacted the people you already know, you can add to the circle of referral partners by employing the same strategies you are using to discover and attract clients.

The best referral partnerships are reciprocal. If the two of you are operating in the same target market, the possibility of referrals 'flowing both ways is quite high'. But, even if you can't imagine how you would be able to refer business to the person you are contacting, don't let that stop you. Savvy business people are always looking for qualified professionals to add to their referral bank, because it helps them take good care of their own clients.

When you meet a potential referral partner, find out as much about the partner's business as you tell her about yours. Exchange marketing literature and several business cards. Ask who would be a good referral for your partner, and explain what type of referral you are looking for. End your conversation by asking "Is there anything else you need to feel confident in referring prospective clients to me?"

Be sure to thank your partners for each and every referral, whether it turns into business for you or not. Prompt thank-yous will generate more referrals. Keep in touch with your partners over time, just as you do with prospective and former clients. And remember to be on the lookout for referrals you can give to your partners. That's the best way possible to stay in touch with them.

NETWORKING ON THE WEB

The skyrocketing use of the Internet has created a number of ways to network without leaving your office. If you subscribe to one of the major on line services, there may be an entire area dedicated to your profession or target market. Making a keyword search of the World Wide Web for sites related to your profession, market of area of expertise will point you to many possibilities. Here are some of the ways you can use the Web to network:

- **Bulleting boards.** Most sites and areas contain one or more bulletin boards where you can post questions or comments on a specific subject. Answering a posted question is an excellent way to demonstrate your expertise. Don't be overly self-promotional. Just include a brief identifier in your signature line, such as Paul Johnson, author of "Web Design for Beginners".
- **Live chats.** Interactive discussion groups exist for almost any topic you can imagine. Participating in these chats is an excellent way to meet people interested in the subject being discussed.
- **Electronic Mailing List (Discussion List).** These contain postings, questions and comments on a specific subject or an interest to a particular group, and are e-mailed to all group members daily, weekly or whenever a new posting arrives. Discussion threads on a hot topic are common on these lists. You can quickly start your own thread by e-mailing a provocative question to a group of interested people, and instructing them to choose reply to all when they respond.

Before participating in any of these forums, spend some time observing how these existing members tend to communicate. When you have a good sense of the accepted protocol, start making your own contributions.

POPULAR CHOICES FOR NETWORKING VENUES

Chamber of commerce mixers workshops, and award ceremonies.

Service clubs such as Rotary.

Trade and professional association meetings where your clients are likely to gather.

Trade and professional association meetings where your referral partners are likely to gather.

Lectures, workshops, conferences, and fund raisers hosted by educational institutions, community organizations and affinity groups.

Social, cultural, and sporting events that include receptions or other mix and mingle time.

Private gatherings organized for the purpose of meeting new people and schmoozing.

Lead exchange groups, where people in non-competitive businesses gather weekly or monthly to swap leads and referrals.

The best venues for networking are those intended to be a place for people to meet. If you attend a function like this, you can be assured that saying hello to someone you don't know will be accepted and welcomed. Just walk up to anyone who looks interesting, stick out your hand and say, "Hi, I haven't met you yet! Give the person your 10-second introduction and ask what he or she does.

If you are naturally shy, you may find that groups with a more structured format work better for you than informal mixers and receptions. Many networking events offer "introductions", which means that all members get a chance to stand up and tell the whole group what they do. Attendees may also be able to display or distribute flyers about their business. Even more structured than this is a lead exchange group.

Where do you find out about groups and events like this? Start by asking around. Anyone who is a likely referral partner for you can probably suggest some. Here are some other places you can look.

- **Yellow pages.** Look under **Associations** or **professional organisations**.
- **Regional and local newspapers.** Look for a **"Business Calendar"** or **"Community Calendar** section.
- **Chamber of commerce.** Ask for a list of **local businesses** and **community organisations**.
- **Business times** or **business journal** for your area
- **Specialized publications** aimed at your **target market's** profession or area of special interest.
- **Websites** that list events. Do a **keyword search** for your city (Exeter)

In looking for events to attend, keep in mind that the way to get the most value from a group is to be a member of it. You will have more success in your networking if you go back to the same groups over and over than if you keep going to new groups all the time. Find two or three that seem to have the right mix of people, and keep going back.

So what if you are uncomfortable talking to strangers? Acquiring good networking skills will benefit you in all areas of your marketing. It's important to learn to introduce yourself smoothly, start a conversation with someone you don't know, and be comfortable in talking about your business in social settings. You might try practising with friends, look for a workshop you could take, or read one of the many books on networking or socialising.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

SUBJECT	KEY POINT
What is Networking?	Building relationships with people
Why should I Network?	To refer business
Advantages of Networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Allows you to convey an interest ➤ People discover who you are and what you do ➤ People get to like you ➤ Ideal for "selling" others ➤ Others "sell" you ➤ Allows you/your business to be known ➤ Provides visibility ➤ Opportunity to make friends ➤ Builds trust ➤ Regular contact increases business
Disadvantages of Networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Time consuming ➤ Done poorly - waste of time ➤ Long lead in time ➤ Requires consistency ➤ Can be daunting to start ➤ Requires identifying the right forum/event
Tips for Networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Don't wait for something to happen ➤ Be clear about what you do ➤ Carry business cards ➤ Obtain business cards from contacts ➤ Carry pen/pencil ➤ Use your Nametag ➤ Concentrate on talking to one person at a time ➤ Stay approx 15 minutes after the event. ➤ Follow up with phone call, meeting or note ➤ Send thank you note to anyone who sends a referral.

NETWORKING GROUPS

5 O'clock club - Relaxed atmosphere ,complimentary nibbles and regular events. No membership cost.

Every Thursday between 5pm and 7pm at the Southgate Hotel, Southernhay East, Exeter.

Contact: Maddie Page-Dove - 01392 412812

Events.southgate@macdonald-hotels.co.uk

Business Network International - The Business Referral Organisation. Established for over 25 years, providing a structured referral system for local business people.

Meetings on a Tuesday at The Rougemont Thistle Hotel, Queen Street, Exeter.

Contact: Mike Borkowski - 01392 685902

Exeter Property Forum - Promoting opportunities and networking in the Exeter property and construction business sectors.

Aims: To bring together those involved in the property and construction industry in and around Exeter.

Contact: Luke de Haan - 0870 4273891

l.dehaan@ashfords.co.uk

Exeter Young Business Club - A new, dynamic initiative bringing young people in business together on a regular basis.

Aims: To enable young people in the Exeter business community to meet and forge relationships with one another.

Contact: Mike Manning - 01392 333885

M.manning@ashfords.co.uk

Networkers Exeter Business - Monthly lunchtime events and "speed" networking meetings. For date and time call - 0845 3071954
info@exeterbusiness.com

The Business League - A very vibrant club based in Exeter. Many businesses are growing and being supported by the club.

Contact: Kevin Allen

Business4u@allenjohnkevin.wanadoo.co.uk

The Exeter Business Network - Over 12 years of bringing businesses together.

Aims: The Exeter Business Network holds monthly networking luncheons where around 90 members and guests come together to develop business relationships.

Contact: Jackie Enright - 01395 578877

Jackie.enright@btconnect.com

The Heart of Devon Enterprise Agency Business Club - Monthly business networking lunches at a local hotel with speaker. No annual membership or joining fee, payment required for each lunch attended.

Contact: Claire Churchill - 0845 370 1011

admin@heartofdevon.com

Women in Business - A newly formed business support network for women in business.

Aims: to encourage more women to become business owners & support those who already own businesses.

Contact: Kath Tatlock - 01363 773535 or Grace Keast 01392 360660

info@businesssupportnetwork.com

FURTHER READING

The Secrets of Savvy Networking: How to Make the Best Connections For Business & Personal Success - Audio. Jan 1995

Brilliant Business Connections

Francis Kay

ISBN 1857039696

Pubn Date: 26/10/2004

Naked Conversations: How Blogs Are Changing The Way Businesses Talk With Customers.

Robert Scoble & Shel Israel

ISBN 047174719

Pubn Date: 31/01/2006

Get Clients Now!

C.J Hayden

ISBN 0814473741

Pubn Date: 01/11/2006

FURTHER READING (Cont)

The World's Best Known Marketing Secret

Ivan R Misner

ISBN: 1885167059

Pubn Date: Feb 1997

7 Second Marketing: How To Use Memory Hooks To Make You Instantly Stand Out In A Crowd

Ivan R Misner

ISBN: 1885167156

Pubn Date: Aug 1996

Business By Referral

Ivan R Misner

ISBN: 188516727

Pubn Date: Mar 1998

Get More Referrals Now! The 4 Cornerstones That Turn Business Relationships Into Gold

Bill Cates

ISBN: 0071417753

Pubn Date: 01/04/2004

CONTACT INFORMATION:

For further information on Networking, please contact:

Ray Bushell - Handle With Care Ltd - 01392 445995

Or email

RayBushell@hwcltd.co.uk