

Top tips for successful Networking

or How to get more Business from Networking

Networking is one of the best ways of getting new business. What does it take to be a successful networker? What are the main rules of networking to achieve the best results?

My name is Mark Shaw and I am one of the founding directors of a UK based networking business – [Mixing Business](#).

I am also the resident expert on networking on a web site called [Tell Me How To..](#)

In addition I am the regional director of [Business Scene](#). This site aims to bring all the different networks under one roof.

The reason that I set up my own networking business, is that I am passionate about networking, passionate about meeting people, and I am passionate about connecting people, so what better way than to have my own business doing the same.

I attend loads of different networking meetings and groups. I have noticed a lot of things about the way people network, the expectations that people have when networking, and what happens after the networking event.

I want you to get more business from networking, I want you to get more clients from networking, I want you to maximise your time and investment in networking but above all, I want you to enjoy the networking experience.

So read all my tips, try them out at networking events, and see if it makes any differences to the outcomes that you have been experiencing.

Choosing the Networking group

There are loads of different groups to try, they range from Breakfast, lunch and dinner groups, to women only, informal, formal, weekend, online and offline etc.... The most important thing is to find the group that fits you and your business. Are the people attending that group the sort of people you would like to talk to, are the people in a position to refer clients / business to you, are you in a position to refer your clients to those people.

Are you likely to meet people that can help you grow your business. Are you likely to meet people that you can help? Bear in mind, that the person who you thought may be of little value, may know the person that you have always wanted to talk to – have an open mind. Try the group a few times before deciding. Your time is a valuable asset, so treat it as such.

You have chosen the Group – Now What

I have attended loads of events. I always wear appropriate attire for that event – usually a suit. Remember first impressions are crucial. People usually judge you rightly or wrongly in the first few seconds – how would you like to be remembered?

I always take loads of business cards. I am amazed at how many people forget their cards or run out of cards and end up writing the details on napkins, torn up pieces of paper etc...

In my experience, most group meetings now will send out an attendance list before hand. You should have a good look through this document. Highlight specific people that you would like to talk to. You will not be able to speak to the whole room so I would suggest focusing your efforts is best.

Then when you arrive, seek out those people, ask the event organiser if they know them, and ask them to introduce you. You may want to go as far as doing some research on them and their company if you are looking at working with them, or forging an alliance. You are there to build advocates and relationships.

You're at the Meeting – Now What

If you are completely new to the networking scene, it can sometimes be a bit daunting. Talking to complete strangers can sometimes be difficult. I would suggest enlisting the help of the event organisers perhaps. Ask them to introduce you to some people. Stand at the bar, it is usually easy to start a conversation whilst people are ordering drinks. **Remember though you are not there to sell to anyone.**

Just ask questions to get to know them, show an interest in others, and they will show an interest in you. Create a nice environment to develop a conversation. Perhaps one of your goals for the event could be to talk to at least 5 new people that you have not met before. You will certainly need to step out of your comfort zone if you have not done it before, however remember that everyone at the event is there for the same reason to meet new people, create new business alliances, and create new contacts.

I would suggest that if attending networking events for the first time, then use the first 3-4 visits to just build up your confidence, practice your questions, practice what you may say in return, try different approaches and see what works for you.

Plan what you are going to say when asked what it is you do. It should be concise and to the point. You should be able to communicate what it is you do so that people can easily understand it in less than 60 seconds. Remember there will be a lot of people at the event, people do not have the time to listen to waffle or very complicated job descriptions. For example someone could say they were in finance. They could also say that they helped people save for their future with the aid of pensions and other financial tools.

Have examples of people that you have worked for or are currently working with and most importantly be as specific as you can with regards to who you would most like to talk to or meet. Don't just say I am looking to meet people in corporate's as that is far too vague. Be specific – tell them you would like to be introduced to the MD / FD of Companies that specialise in the manufacture of a certain product.

Listening is perhaps the hardest thing. We all naturally want to tell our story. However resist this temptation. Ask other people questions about their business, show a genuine interest in them and

what they are up to, try and create a relationship, try to really understand the other person and how you could possibly help.

Ask them about the challenges they are facing, what projects they are currently working on, who would they like to meet given the opportunity. Ask them how you can help them, is there anyone in your network that can assist them.

It won't Happen Instantly

Networking takes time, it is very rare to come away with an order from attending one event. You should view attending the event and then gaining some new contacts, as the first step in a long road. Networking can typically take 3-6 months of attending and talking and listening to people.

The key to it usually lies in the follow up after the event. It is also about credibility, would you refer a client to someone that you had only just met – I suggest not. However see them for 3-6 months, talking about the same profession, and your confidence in them will grow.

To Hand out or Not to Hand Out your Business Card

I am always asked this question. My own opinion is that I prefer to get to know the other person first, listen to them, find out about them, find out about their business, see if there is any common ground between the two of you, can you help this person, can they help you? If things are looking favourable then I will ask for their card. I do not hand out my card unless requested.

However, if someone just comes up to me and says – can I have your card, then I usually politely refuse. Why would they want my card? They do not know me, they do not know what I do, and typically all that will happen is that I will now find myself on another e-mail list for a product or service that I am not interested in.

Go to the events with the right approach

Whenever I attend events, I always go with the idea of how can I help people, who do I know that I can introduce this new person to, is there someone else in the room that evening, that should be talking to this person. You will certainly gain a lot more from networking with this approach than going merely with the intention of getting more business for yourself.

You cannot remember everything

If all is going well, you should have met a fair amount of new people at the event, you have listened to all of them and will now have a good understanding of them and their business, and who they are looking to meet – you then get home, and it is all a blur. You must take notes, you will not remember things, and most importantly you will not remember who you said you would connect them to. **Write things down**

Moving on from someone you do not wish to talk to.

When you are at networking events, remember that there will always be people there that you do not wish to talk to for a variety of reasons, and there are people that whilst listening to them and getting an understanding of them and their business, you simply find rude, arrogant, boring, and are simply not interested in them. You need to find a way to move on.

This can be simply excusing yourself to the ladies / Gents, going to the bar for another drink, explaining to them that you are on a tight time frame and you cannot talk to just them all night. Do not feel that you must talk to someone that you do not want to. Your time is precious, move on and find someone that is engaging and interesting. However also recognise that speaking to this one person all night is also probably not a great use of your time. Why not suggest to them a meeting after the event, to explore things further.

After the event – then what

I attend many events, and always follow up with people that I have met. I always drop people an email thanking them for the chat we had at the event, and following up on any activities that I promised I would. If I said I would introduce them to someone, then I do. If I promised a contacts details, then I get it to them.

I cannot stress how important this is. In my experience very few people actually follow up after a meeting. Why chat with someone, discover all about them, discover mutual things that may benefit both of you, take their business card, and then do nothing with it. As far as I am concerned, this is a tragedy and a complete waste of your attending the event. **You must follow up.**

What to do with old business cards

So you have attended loads of events, and your top drawer is packed full of business cards. Most people place a rubber band round them and then that's it. The cards then sit there forever. Bear in mind, people move on, people change jobs, there may be someone in that pile of business cards who now works for the corporate where you want to get involved.

Drop people an email every 6 months or so, asking how they are doing, are they still at the same company, are they still doing the same job, you may be amazed at the response.

Above all Go to Enjoy Yourself

Networking is a great way to introduce yourself to a gathering of people. You are not there to sell anything to anyone. People in my experience do not like to be sold to and can see it coming a mile away. View the people at the event as a way of getting your product / idea etc... to market.

Understand that you will need to be patient, it will take months to start benefiting from any contacts you have made. However it certainly is true, if you start things off by helping others, listening to others, making connections for others, then things will certainly start happening for you.

Don't Forget Other forms of Marketing

In my opinion networking is great, however, don't forget there are other forms of marketing that you should be using as well. It can be very easy to be occupied with Breakfast, lunch and dinner on networking without any noticeable benefit.

You must constantly evaluate both the cost of attendance, time utilised and the return gained. Keep asking yourself if the group, groups that you attend are really working for you after giving them a reasonable amount of time. **If not move on.**

If you would like to contact me for further information on how to get more from networking please contact me on the details below

Mark Shaw
mark@markshaw.biz
07990 743 564

© Copyright Mark Shaw 2006
