



7 Step Plan To Get Going With Networking - Web Design Imagineers

Mini Ebook Series - Edward C Blanchard

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When used wisely and appropriately, networking is one of your most cost-effective business building tools. But, don't approach it as a method to sell. Networking is the process of creating relationships where you can help others achieve their goals, and they can help you achieve yours.

Whether you're an introvert or an extrovert, feel like you have the gift of gab or just don't know how to make small talk, networking know-how is very important for your business success. There is a notion in business that I believe most of us subscribe to that says "all things being equal, people will do business with and refer business to those they know, like and trust." And the key to this is obviously being able to develop relationships.

Think of networking as the cultivation of mutually beneficial, win-win relationships. In order to be win-win, there must be GIVE and take (notice the emphasis on give). Networking shouldn't be viewed as "events" where you go to sell your business. When effective networking is taking place, the parties involved actively share ideas, information, resources, etc.

Ok, so you know that you should be networking because it is one of the most cost-effective lead generation activities when used wisely, appropriately and professionally. But, maybe that seems easier said than done. Here's a seven step plan to really get going with networking for your business.

1. Check out several groups to find the best chemistry and perceived value. Most groups will allow you to come and visit at least a couple of times before you have to join. Go and ask around to find out why others have joined and what value they get out of belonging.

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Resist the urge to just go join the Chamber of Commerce simply because everyone tells you that's what you need to do. If that's not where your target group can be found, then you might just be wasting a considerable amount of time (and money).

I'm not telling you not to join the Chamber. Just be clear about what you'd like to get out of this or any other group. If it's to find prospective clients or referral sources, then you need to be networking where those resources can be found.

2. When you find a group or two, join and go to all the meetings you can. Don't go just once or twice expecting things to happen and then if they don't quit. Building mutually beneficial, win-win relationships will take some time.

The contacts you make need to constantly see your face and hear your message. Continual contact with others over time will open up opportunities for you to go deeper and learn more about each others thoughts, ideas and capabilities in regards to your respective businesses.

Know, like, and trust generally only happens over time. Being regular and persistent will pay off.

3. Get involved – be visible. Do as much as you can to make yourself more visible within the organization. Volunteer to help with meetings, be on committees, or become a leader or board member.

Being involved does a couple of things for you and your business. First, you'll get more opportunities to establish connections and get to know some of the contacts you've made even better. Secondly, the higher the visibility you have in the group, the less you'll have to work to make new connections. Instead, as new people come into the group, they will likely seek you out because they view you as a leader within the organization.

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4. Keep your circles of contacts informed. Don't just assume that running in to someone once a month (or even once a week) will cause them to start doing business with you or sending it your way. You need to let them know what's going on when you're not at that particular group in order to inform and educate them.

Send them invitations to your events or open houses. Send them email or letters to share big news or success stories, especially anything of relevance to them or those in their networks of contacts. If you believe that you have valuable ideas, information and resources to share with others, then doesn't this just make sense?

5. Work at GIVING referrals and sharing valuable information. That's right, you need to be willing to GIVE before you get. That means you need to get to know other members and what makes a good prospect for them. What kinds of information might you have access to that could be useful to them?

You may initially think you don't have much of value to share with others (besides your business and what you provide). Part of the key to getting good at giving is to not make assumptions. For example, don't assume that some basic resource (e.g., a web site) that you're aware of is familiar to someone you might be talking to just because they are the "expert" in that field. Be willing to ask if they know about the resource and ready to share if they don't.

Want to get better at actually giving referrals? Here's a simple question to ask someone you're connecting with. "How am I going to know when I meet a really good prospect for you?"

Just the fact that you are willing to explore giving will elevate your know, like and trust factor.

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6. Focus on Quality, not Quantity, Quantity, Quantity. It's not necessarily about the number of connections you make, but about the quality of the ones you do make. Are they mutually beneficial, win-win relationships?

Quality connections will be identifiable because all involved parties will be actively sharing ideas, information, and resources. Yes, it is true that you need to spend some time and effort getting to know the other person(s) and what's important to them. But, you also need to be clear and actively thinking about what information or resources you want and need.

Staying in touch with and following up with a smaller number of quality relationships will generally be much more productive than trying to follow up with a larger number of superficial contacts.

7. Be persistent, but be patient. The goal of a networking event shouldn't necessarily be to come away with prospects every time you go out, but to come away with great connections. Networking usually takes time to get the relationships developed and nurtured.

Don't approach networking as a scary proposition or a necessary evil for being in business. Take the pressure off yourself and really focus on how you might be able to connect with someone you meet. Focus on them first and look for ways to be useful to them. As you become known as a connector you'll eventually be ready to reap what you sow.

Web Design Imagineers

graham@webdesign-imagineers.co.uk

0800 026 0766

www.webdesign-imagineers.co.uk