

10 Tips For Better Networking

2007-03-13 15:41:12



Networking is a marketing mainstay for businesses of all sizes and especially essential for the success of any home business. So what is networking and how do you go about networking to promote your home business?

Networking in a formal sense is the connection of people for the purpose of exploring mutually beneficial business opportunities. You might be thinking that this definition is rather obvious it is; however exactly how to go about creating those opportunities is less than obvious.

1.) Always Be Ready To Network

Networking opportunities rarely occur when you most expect them to. They can happen anywhere from your local pub to the gym locker room. With this in mind it's important to always be prepared. The work at home lifestyle doesn't require much in the way of a dress code; working in your pyjamas might be one of the reasons you decided to work at home in the first place. However you're unlikely to impress anyone dressed in your pyjamas while shopping for milk and bread always look presentable when leaving the house and don't forget to always have a few business cards handy in your wallet or purse.

2.) An Opportunity Can Present Itself At Any Time.

Opportunities can present themselves anytime, anywhere. Always be prepared to get your business face on and think networking. Networking is a two way street so always keep your eyes and ears open for opportunities for others. Passing on an opportunity to someone else is a great way to cement a relationship.

3.) Take The Next Step

Always follow up first meetings with a friendly email or phone call. Many networking opportunities start with a very subtle invitation. Another business person might mention they are interested in seeing more of your work or learning more about what you have to offer. While comments like this aren't an instant invitation to do business they can be the start to great relationship. So be sure to request a business card or contact details and make contact the next day.

4.) Make The Occasional Personal Gesture

Technology has made communication, especially in business, easy. It has also made communication less personal in this environment personal gestures go a long way, much further than they did 20 years ago.

A personal gesture is any communication that is not business related, but just as useful and constructive. As an example, last year at a new year's party I got chatting with a graphic designer I know, I mentioned I was web designer and he mentioned his company might need a website in the future. The next week I made contact with a simple email to say hello but also included a link to an article on branding I thought he might be interested in reading. Sending the link was the personal gesture, they go a long way towards founding great relationships.

5.) Its A Two Way Street

Be alert for opportunities for others. Essential to building a great network is helping others achieve success, as you help others so they will help you. There is no better way to create favour with contacts than to create an opportunity where they can find success. Even if they aren't successful with the opportunity you have forwarded them, the gesture is still very meaningful.

6.) Don't Do All The Talking

Too often people ruin networking opportunities by talking about themselves too much. Nothing is worse than meeting someone for the first time, only to be subjected to a monologue about themselves and their work. Use concise sentences when talking about yourself and try not to repeat yourself. Asking interesting questions is the best way to create constructive two way conversation. Remember, don't do all the talking.

7.) Don't Forget To Say Thanks

Being part of a great business network means you will get passed opportunities from time to time. Irregardless of their outcome, don't forget to sincerely thank the person who passed the opportunity along.

8.) Sometimes You Just Have To Ask

Many business people don't operate with networking in mind. Sometimes you have to ask to create opportunities. If you've been chatting with someone about business opportunities ask them if you can follow the conversation up with a call. If a client is particularly happy with the work you have done, ask them if they know anyone else who might need your services. Sometimes these things just don't occur to people unless you ask.

9.) Grow A Thick Skin

The previous point can be a very scary proposition for some. The sooner you can shake your fear of rejection, the better. The worst reply you can ever get for asking is no. Don't take rejection personally and get over it as quickly as possible. Rejection is part of doing business, the better you become at dealing with it the more chances you have of being successful.

10.) Extend Yourself

Success is never easily achieved. Chances are most networking opportunities will be outside of your comfort zone. Extend yourself - join clubs and organizations, go places you normally wouldn't and speak to different people. The more you break out of your comfort zone the easier it will become and the more networking opportunities you will be exposed to.