



Making your networking more profitable

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More Prospects

More Business

More Referrals

How Networking Works to Drive Business Growth

— by Ron Gibson

To attract clients, make sales and grow your business, you've got to network. But *how* do you network? How do you just go out and meet someone and then turn that person into a client or a referral source? What are the nuts and bolts to this process? What should you actually do and say? Is there some kind of formula? And how do you go about doing this in a natural, true-to-you kind of way, without being pushy or looking too desperate for business?

It's frustrating when your business networking isn't paying off with new business. This article offers best practices and some healthy thinking on how to make networking a successful way to drive sales and business growth.

Why network?

Ask the people who own the most successful businesses. Ask the top business developers and sales people at their company or firm. Ask the high fee earning, accountants, architects, consultants, advisors, engineers and lawyers in your community. Ask the top bankers, executive recruiters, insurance advisers and real estate brokers. Ask the most in-demand corporate trainers, coaches and speakers.

All of them will tell you that majority of their clients and customers, their best work and most of their business comes from relationships and a strong word of mouth reputation. All of them will also tell you that relationships and a strong word of mouth reputation are the result of **networking**.

If you have responsibility for business development, networking is your number one business development strategy. No doubt about it. Nothing can consistently connect you with prospects and land you new business like networking can.

Sure you can prospect for new clients over the phone via cold calls — but you usually get the cold shoulder. You can send out masses of direct mail to find new

clients — but most mailings are grossly ineffective. You can put on seminars — but they don't pull in the prospects the way they used to. And you can spend a lot of money on newsletters, brochures, advertisements and upgrading your website — but these have rarely proven to be a significant source of new clients.

It makes good business sense that networking should be treated as an integral part of every company's and every firm's marketing and business development plan.

Chasing that next promotion? Network! Wanting to change careers? Network!

Aside from business development, networking is a powerful way to enrich and advance your career. **Over 60 percent of people find jobs through networking.** And you can bet most of them didn't achieve this goal because of their talent alone. Someone else — a friend, a colleague, a contact, a client — put in a good word for them, introduced them, opened a door for them or helped with some information.

Personal connections with the right people are often key to finding a good job or getting that important promotion.

More generally, networking increases your exposure to new contacts, new ideas, new trends and new ways of looking at things. Networking connects you with other business people to discuss common issues and challenges, brainstorm best practices, increase learning, feed off each other's experiences, find out what's happening in your industry, tap into new markets and learn what your competitors are doing and who the best suppliers are.

Wish you had a knowledgeable mentor? Get out there and network!

Business networking is often misunderstood.

A lot of people who think they're networking really aren't. They either waste their time and resources by merely socialising or, missing the point altogether, feel they have to be continually elevator pitching strangers, trying to drum up business from them.

Networking is NOT socialising. Socialising doesn't cut it because that simply involves hanging out with people for a good time. Don't get me wrong. Good networking is fun and it should be social, but it must also have a purpose. If there's no talk about how you can help each other, if there's no sharing of valuable information, if there's no opportunity created to pursue afterwards, if there's no agreement to do something or if there's no follow-up to continue building the relationship, you're not networking, you're socialising.

If you're looking to do business today from the people you meet that's selling, not networking.

Networking is NOT selling. Many think that the whole idea of networking is to join business clubs or go along to networking events, cocktail parties, conferences, etc., and seek to drum up new business from the other people who are in attendance. This is a simplistic and ineffective approach. Although it is true that you may get some people at these meetings to do business with you, as a general rule, you will gain more business from the friends and associates of the people at the event — the unseen third parties or extended network. More on this later.

If you're just offering/promoting your wares to your contacts, you're not networking.

Most people who think they're networking really aren't. They oscillate between socialising and selling, wasting their time and resources. It's frustrating and results are disappointing. Maybe that's why so many business professionals give up on networking or put it on the bottom of their priority list; they've been doing it wrong!

More about what networking isn't

Networking is not about how many business cards you can give out or collect. Similarly, it's not about how many numbers you have in your Blackberry or how many contacts you have on LinkedIn or how many friends you have on Facebook or how many followers you have on Twitter. The problem here is that many people try to equate their list of contacts with successful networking. They think the bigger the list, the better. However, almost any successful sales/business development professional will tell you that large lists of easily gathered names are merely "contacts" and that it is only through building a relationship and trust with each contact, one at a time, by following up and staying in personal touch, that you can turn them into clients, customers and referral sources.

It's better to be the best connected than the most connected.

Technology makes it dead easy to stockpile "contacts". But be honest with yourself are you just playing a numbers game or does your network provide true value?

Networking is not something you turn on when you find yourself anxiously looking for business. Networking seems to be one of those things that many people do when business slows or dries up. It often gets forgotten or put on the backburner when things "get busy". Big mistake. Not networking today translates into an empty pipeline of business three or so months down the track. Networking should be an integral part of how you keep the revenues flowing. It should be a part your daily working routine — in both the good times and the bad. Consistent networking — meeting new people and keeping in touch with the people you know — is the secret to keeping the pipeline filled with opportunities and new business, even in a slow economy, and *especially* in a slow economy. (When the economy slows, the wheels of commerce don't grind to a halt. Deals are still being done, business continues to happen. There are just fewer deals and less business happening than when the

economy was strong. It's just that, in a slow economy, business is done more so between people who know and trust each other.)

You network NOT when you need it — you network so that when you need it, your network is there for you.

It's not uncommon that people use their networks when they need them and let them lapse until they need them again. However, this violates the principle of networking, which is based on mutual exchange and mutual benefit. Think about it. Are you giving as much as you take? Do your actions reflect other's needs and not just yours?

So, what is business networking?

Business networking has a much broader perspective and scope than merely talking to people and exchanging business cards. And it's a whole lot more than just going to networking events and conferences, etc. or joining networking groups and industry associations.

The people who do it best understand that networking is fundamentally about establishing and developing ongoing meaningful and beneficial relationships with people. By focusing on how you can help others to succeed and prosper, you contribute to their success as well as your own.

By helping others, they will be motivated to reciprocate by helping you back. It's only human nature.

From the perspective of developing business, networking is getting to know other people and what their business is all about and them getting to know you and what your business is all about. So much so, that you tell your friends and associates about each other. It's all about mutual cooperation. If you help them spread the word about their business, you can be sure that they'll do the same for you. Isn't it true that referrals and word-of-mouth recommendations are the best advertising and business you can get? Isn't it also true that you want more of that kind of business – business that comes to you instead of you having to chase after it?

In the business world, we're often told to network. But no-one tells us HOW.

As you read this article, you will gain some valuable pointers on how to make business networking work for you.

1. Attend events.

If you're having trouble getting clients and growing your business, it's most likely because you haven't developed a large enough network. You need a certain critical mass of "connections" in order to produce a reliable stream of clients/customers and referrals. So what's the best way to meet new people? Get out of your office. Go places.

Identify people you would like to get to know. Attend breakfast meetings, lunches, sun-downers, forums, conferences and seminars where the opportunity to meet them might present itself. Attend other types of business events where you can mix with people you usually might not meet. The wider the variety of events you attend the greater the opportunity to form new connections and build up your network.

Just don't go to there to sell to the people you meet.

The biggest mistake that many people make with their networking is to go out prospecting for new clients. People don't go to networking events to be sold and if you're there with the main aim of looking to do some business or make a sale yes, you'll come away with some business cards but no-one will respond to your attempts to follow up with them.

In networking, your goal is not to turn your contacts into clients, but to turn THEIR relationships into clients. In other words, sell through your network contacts, not to them.

At its core, business networking is selling THROUGH your network, not TO your network. If you go to events only to sell your product or service to the people that are there, you are missing out on the potential business that comes from these people referring and recommending you.

The real power of your connections is in who THEY know: there are many more opportunities there.

The idea is to develop relationships with people who will then refer and support you, rather than seeing each person you meet as a potential "buyer" of your product or service. You see the majority of new business you will get in the future will NOT come directly from the people you meet at events. It will come INDIRECTLY as a result of these people dropping your name and recommending you over lunch, on the golf course, at parties and in numerous other situations to their friends and associates.

If you want to get more out of networking events, stop looking for prospects and start looking for referral partners instead.

For many people, there's a paradigm shift that needs to take place if they're going to make the most of the business development potential of networking events. That shift is to move from seeing people at events as potential clients and customers to seeing them as potential advocates. It's not the person in front of you that has the greatest potential to give you business, but it's the people THEY know — it's the referrals they might give you, the introductions they might facilitate for you.

I'm not saying you won't ever land a new client or make a sale at a networking event. In some cases, you will. I'm just saying it won't happen as often as you'd like. The reality is that few people attend a networking event looking to buy something and they certainly didn't go there to be sold to by you or anyone else. Explaining

what your products and services are is quite appropriate. Just don't try to sell them. Other people will see right through you and be unlikely to want to associate with you.

So, don't go to networking events with the intention of selling to people in the room. And don't go events in the hope of collecting business cards from people just so you can sell to them later on in your follow up communications, newsletters, etc. That's not how business networking works!

The idea is to start a conversation that can be continued at a later date. That initial encounter should be just about discovering common ground, building rapport and creating an interest in taking the conversation further. Then your goal is to build trusting relationships with those good connections you've made by following up and staying in touch with them. You want to ensure that they know about your products/services/solutions are, what problems they solve for what type of people — and the typical results you tend to achieve. If you get the relationship right and your message is easily understood, your networking associates will happily refer and recommend you. And, if they recognize that they struggle from the problems you can solve, they'll happily buy from you too.

You need to know, like, rate and trust someone before you refer or recommend them to someone else. The same is true before someone will go out of their way to refer or recommend you. The trust, like, rate and trust “thing” develops over time and that's why the relationship is so important. Focus on building the relationship and you will reap tremendous rewards over time.

(See my article entitled, *Inexpensive and Creative Ways to Build Business Relationships: Winning the Battle for Mindshare by Keeping in Touch*).

My philosophy is that I would rather you refer me time and time again than buy from me once. That will produce a lot more business for me. And, if you trust me enough to refer me, who else would you buy from if you needed my service or product?

Question: What if you meet someone at a business event who shows an interest in or seems to need your product or service? **Answer:** Defer the pitch. Resist the temptation to move into sales mode then and there. You don't want to risk blowing your opportunity by talking too much about your business. Simply exchange cards and agree to talk further at a later date. Whenever I find myself in a situation like this, I'll say something like, *“Let's find a better time to continue this conversation. Can I call you tomorrow so we can discuss this further?”* Or, I might say, *“Why don't we continue this conversation in a more private setting over a coffee/over lunch/over a drink after work? Can I call you to arrange a meeting?”* Other variations of these phrases are, *“Would you be interested in grabbing a coffee sometime so we can continue this conversation?”*, *“If I could help you with that would you be interested?”* and *“Can I call you in a week or so to discuss the services I offer?”* As a general

rule, it's best to defer the sales pitch for a better occasion and get on with meeting some other people.

For the ultimate guide on how to maximise the business development potential of business and industry events, see my article entitled, ***How to Enjoy and Get the Most Out of Business Networking Events.***

2. Join and become an active member in two different types of business or industry associations.

Choose an association that represents or is related to your industry/field/target market and another that has more of a general business focus such as your local chamber of commerce. You'll meet experts in your specific market in the first type and mix with successful business people from all areas in the other kind. Each will provide valuable contacts — people you usually would not get to meet. A few will need your services in the future. Some will know someone who does. And many will introduce you to people they know who will know someone who will need your services one day.

Joining associations is not an option, it's absolutely necessary if you seek to make influential connections.

I know many people that joined an industry/professional association and left after a few weeks saying things like, "There's no point in going, it's the same people every time and once you've pitched to them and sold nothing, there's no point in talking to them again." And it is very common to hear people say that. What has happened, of course, is that they fell into the trap of thinking that the people in their group were potential customers. They didn't widen their scope to see that each of their fellow members was in fact a potential advocate or, in other words, the "key" to a much bigger network outside the association or group.

Join and join in—make sure you attend most, if not all, of your association's events, do presentations on your field of expertise, write articles for the newsletter and grow relationships with other members by catching up with them 121 between association meetings to get to know each other and each other's business better.

Your goal is to become a prominent and visible member of the association you join. As a member you will have access to some products and services that can be very helpful in your niche marketing efforts, such as membership lists and regular publications. Make sure you turn up to most (if not all) of the association's major events – this will boost your visibility amongst the membership and once members get to know you and understand what you do and the people you do it for, they will recommend you and refer business your way. And, if they recognise that they struggle from the problems you can solve, they'll happily buy from you too.

You are not just looking to get clients directly from the group. You want your fellow members to refer you to the people they know and refer those people to you. So those relationships other members are very important.

To truly benefit from your membership you must get involved. Get on a committee or board. Join a “special project” team. Do something. Offer ideas. Write an article for the association’s newsletter or magazine. Assist with the meet and greet at events — a great way to meet new faces. Become friends with centers’ of influence — the president, past presidents, board/committee members and others who are just very active in the association. Sit down with these people and find out what’s important to them, what their issues, challenges and priorities are and ask them how you can help them with their duties. Then serve them. And serve them well because they can make or break you. As you develop your relationships with these centers of influence, make sure you tell them (and continue to remind them) that you’re concentrating your marketing efforts in their industry and that you could use their help in expanding your business. Remember, if your product/service is good these people will refer and support you. And as people who can influence the patronage behavior of dozens, hundreds, even thousands of your target audience, it pays to have them on your side.

After becoming a member, get involved with committee work where you’ll form lasting relationships.

Giving time to your association via committee work begins the mutually beneficial part of networking. As members notice that you’re giving they’ll be more likely refer and support you.

2a. Maybe it’s time to re-evaluate your memberships?

Ask yourself these questions:

—How long have you been an member of that association/group?

—Do you like the people there?

—Are you learning anything being a part of this group that will help you in your business/career?

If the answer is NO to these questions, then it’s time to re-think your involvement with the group with the following caveats:

—If you haven’t been in the group that long you need to give it a *real* shot, unless you really don’t like the people there. Then it’s time to get out.

—If you haven’t given away any business to any others, no one is going to give business to you.

Join associations and build relationships with people who will either provide you with information or who will help you grow your business by either becoming clients themselves or helping you find clients by referring you to others who need your services.

One last thing. Just because you leave a group doesn’t mean you cannot stay in touch and continue to grow relationships with people you like who you met in the group.

3. Join a networking/referral group.

Another very effective way to build up your network is to join a business networking or business referral group.

There are many of these groups around that exist to help members of the group form a referral network. Choose your group carefully by ensuring it is made up of members who are well connected to your target market. Have regular 121 meetings with other members of the group to build strong relationships with them — until they get to like and trust you, they will not pass business your way. Always be on the lookout for business opportunities for others in the group — the more referrals you give, the more referrals you will get. Don't try to sell directly to the group members. Whilst there may be potential clients for you within the group, your aim should be to "recruit" your fellow members as advocates, as your unpaid sales force.

A good way to find one of these groups, is to type in your location (city/suburb) and the words "networking meeting" or "networking group" on Google and see what comes up.

You might also consider prestigious clubs like Rotary, Lions, The 500 Club, and The Melbourne Club and similar types of clubs that exist in all capital cities. Although typically, you need to know someone who will nominate you as a member. You just can't walk into these places.

4. Start your own networking/referral group.

As you get the hang of networking you might determine that the time has come for you to start your own networking or referral group. By doing this it can be very beneficial. You may be in a highly competitive field like legal, accounting, insurance, banking, financial planning, executive recruitment or real estate and all the positions in the established exclusive groups are filled. Starting your own group would give you the opportunity to participate in an exclusive or non-competitive group. Of course, when you start such a group you have the added luxury of determining who will be allowed in the group, when the group meets, where it meets and all other logistical aspects of the group. The greatest benefit is that you will have the opportunity to demonstrate your leadership abilities. This will make you instantly more likely to receive leads and referrals. Everyone wants to be associated with a leader.

**A strategic referral group should consist of
people who do not compete with each other and
all helping each other develop new business.**

These groups are typically made up of motivated business owners, professionals, consultants and salespeople from complementary (non-competing) businesses who target the same or similar markets and clients. Within the group, members have clients or customers that could benefit from services of the others. And each member is well positioned to recommend their fellow members' services to their clients and contacts.

These groups meet regularly with the unabashed purpose of helping each other get business. Groups usually meet monthly, but some meet every two weeks or even every week. The professional and focused "climate" in the meetings provides a forum for effective networking and all the benefits that networking brings.

Members continue to network in between the group meetings by scheduling one-on-ones with each other. By getting together for breakfast, lunch, dinner or coffee, sitting and talking, and finding out about each other's business, families, interests, goals, etc, intra-group relationships are further developed and nurtured.

Through rapport, trust and confidence in one another, the group members refer clients to each other, form strategic alliances, promote each other's company and products, share business opportunities and marketplace intelligence and discuss common challenges and issues. In addition, they learn sales and marketing skills from one another and learn a lot more from each other's not-so-successful ventures.

Using the group for leveraging each other's connections, experience and advice and resources saves members business development time and money and provides a superior alternative to attending yet another sales course or reading yet another how-to book on marketing.

**A strategic referral group can help you and your business
succeed better and faster than you can on your own.**

Membership in each group is limited to just one person for a particular type or category of business so that intra-group competition (for business), which would inhibit collaboration, is avoided. And groups are small with a maximum of about ten people to encourage members to invest the time necessary to get to know each other personally and to understand each other's business, target markets and the value they bring to their clients — which ultimately results in more leads, referrals and new business for all members.

Being a member of such a group is like having your own personal business development community — a team of seasoned business professionals who are, in effect, your unpaid marketing department and sales force. By working together, the group members can reach a level of business development that could never be achieved alone.

Where do you find the people to form your networking group? If you don't already know who you want in your group, find the publications, magazines, websites that your target audience reads to keep up with their industry and see who is writing the articles and advertising in these publications. Contact them and ask if they would like to be part of your group to help all of your respective businesses. What's the worst thing that can happen? They say "no"? If this happens, there is more than one person who can take their place.

For more help with starting your own networking group, see my article entitled, ***"Network Strategically to Gain More and Better Referrals for Your Business"***.

4. Maintain visibility at a local level.

The most successful people are active as a participants, leaders and advocates of their local business and community groups. The more you are involved in your local groups, the more widely known you will be, the more information you will obtain

about others, the more opportunities you will be exposed to, and the greater will be your chances of being accepted by other individuals or groups as someone to whom they can or should refer business.

Be seen otherwise you are out of sight, out of mind.

5. Be in the moment.

The key to successful networking is paradoxical. If you focus on the other person, the benefits to you happen as a pleasant side-effect. Don't think about your next meeting, the other people in the room or the last conversation you had. Just be there with the person you are talking with. Be *genuinely* interested in what he has to say, be *genuinely* curious about what interests her and be generous with your attention, making them feel as though they are the only other person in the world at that moment. What you take away from a networking interaction is directly related to what you give away during that networking interaction. Give people your full attention. You'll build trust faster.

Once you have shown genuine interest in the other person, in most cases, they will show the same level of interest in you.

6. Ask smart questions.

The core of networking is creating real and solid friendships. Just like a friendship, your networking relationships should be completely mutual. As tempting as it may be, don't become an "all-about-me" person. Take the time to get to know the other person. What is important to them? What makes them tick?

People like to have the opportunity to talk about what they do and why it is that their companies, products and services are unique and different. They like explaining why people buy from them and the benefits they get. All they need is the right question to get them started. You can never go wrong asking, "*How's your business doing these days?*" An even better question you can ask is, "*What do I have to know about your business to recommend you to a potential client/ customer?*"

With good questions, you will be able to successfully lead a conversation (without dominating it) in any situation. At the same time, you will be creating an opportunity for the other person to ask you questions. You can usually count on reciprocity and be assured that if you ask about their business they will ask you about yours. People like to do business with and refer business to people they like and people will like you when you show a genuine interest in them and their business. For the best questions you can ask to connect, make friends and build your business see my article entitled, "***How to Enjoy and Make the Most of Networking Events***".

Good questions build your credibility. When you first meet with a prospect, how do you establish your credibility and understand their goals and needs? Most people's natural tendency is to do this be *telling* — by describing their company, the benefits of their offerings, their awards, etc. They try to talk the prospect into believing how great they are. But this approach falls flat. This excessive "telling" comes across as boastful and too salesy. The best way to build trust in your

competence is to ask questions that demonstrate your experience while encouraging the prospect (or the client) to talk about their agenda, their issues and their challenges. Here are some credibility-building/issue-discovery questions you can adapt and use for your own particular prospects and clients:

- *“As I look at my other clients in your industry, they are all looking to grab a share of the business that’s being done on social media. Some are focusing exclusively on LinkedIn, others are trying LinkedIn and either Twitter or Facebook and a few are focusing on all three as a comprehensive social media strategy. What are you doing in this area? What are your most successful business development practices?”*
- *“How are the new compliance requirements (i.e., to a new regulation) impacting on your business? All of my clients across the profession are getting bogged down with more staff training and a mountain of additional paperwork.”*
- *“Where will your future growth come from?”*
- *“What is the most important thing to you about your company?” “Why is that so important to you?”*
- *“How will you decide whether or not to (make an important decision)?”*
- *“If you had additional resources, which opportunities or areas would you invest them in?” “Can you tell me more?”*
- *“As you think about the future of your business, what are you most excited about? What are you most concerned about?”*

You build trust in an initial meeting by being thought-provoking and helping your prospect think differently about their issues — not just by giving them information or facts about your business.

Here are some additional questions you might find useful in developing relationships with prospects and clients:

- *When a prospect is acting standoffish and aloof: “What in particular interested you when you agreed to meet with me today?”*
- *When no agenda has been clearly set: “From your perspective, what would be the most valuable use of our time together?”*
- *If you sense the other person is disengaged or distracted: “What’s the most important thing we should be talking about today?”*
- *When you want to challenge the prospect’s solution and understand the underlying issue or objective: “Tell me why you want to do that”*
- *To get someone to tell you about their career or their business: “How did you get your start?” or “How did you get started?”*
- *To get someone to reflect on their role and their effectiveness in it: “What parts of your job do you wish you could spend more time on and which parts do you wish you could de-emphasise or stop doing?”*

Asking questions is a great way to engage with people when meeting them for the first time. People generally as a rule like to talk about themselves. They want to tell you about their businesses, their jobs, their kids, their lives. So let them. Giving the other person an opportunity to talk about themselves while you are actively listening can help you find some common ground to establish a new relationship. And even if

there is no relationship to be had, by you listening increases the chances that they will leave the conversation with a high opinion of you.

Not asking the right questions is arguably the biggest mistake people make with their networking. It is so easy to miss opportunities by getting caught up in social chat about the economy, politics, sport etc, without finding out how the person you're talking to might be able to help you and vice-versa. See my article entitled, "**How to Enjoy and Make the Most of Networking Events**" for the very best networking questions to can ask to make new friends and build lasting profitable relationships.

Also see my article entitled, "**90 Top Questions to Persuade Clients and Prospects to Open Up Want to Work With You**"

7. Make 121 in-person meetings a regular part of your business routine.

To be effective in your business networking you need others to be your word of mouth advocates, your unpaid sales force. This involves building relationships with people who trust you enough to refer and recommend you. These relationships are built by face to face two way interaction. They start with conversations which involve as much listening as talking. They grow by agreeing to do things, following through on these commitments and reviewing things. They continue to grow by agreeing to do more, following through on these commitments and reviewing regularly. Email and phone communications have a part to play, but face to face conversations are vital to building the depth of relationships (and trust) necessary to make us effective at getting business to come to us.

Big question: **Are you spending enough time meeting in person with the right people for your business networking to be effective?**

Limit the chit chat at these meetings. Focus the conversation on the products and services each of you provide, what problems each of you solve and for what people and the typical results each of you tend to achieve for your clients/customers. **Make it your goal to walk away from the meeting with a mutual understanding of each other's products and services and how you can best help each other develop more business.**

When you meet in person your communication involves much more than the words exchanged. Your eyes and body language reveal much more than the words in an email. The REAL reason to meet in person is because this is so important to building relationships and trust.

And stick to your appointments with each other. Think of your 121s as you would an appointment with your best client. Would you cancel on them?

8. Google the people you expect to meet before you meet them.

Chemistry comes from finding points of connection. The more you know about someone, the more likely you are to find those points. Knowing where someone went to school, where they worked, what their interests and hobbies are can help you establish an instant rapport with potential networking contacts. You can review

their LinkedIn profiles, Twitter streams and even their Facebook pages. Look for common personal touch points. Are there any common connections? Do they have interests/hobbies that are similar to yours? Make a note of any potential talking points. Search to see if their company or firm has been in the news. And, what about the individuals themselves? Most people are flattered and will readily connect with you if you mention something about them or their business that received positive press. And doing so makes it clear that you're up to speed with industry news.

**Connect — find something in common
with the other person that links you together.**

Use **Google Alerts** (www.google.com/alerts). This allows you to set up searches for any individual, company, organization or phrase and receive e-mail alerts any time that any of these show up online. Do this for your top ten clients, customers, referral sources and other key networking contacts and you'll be up to date with what's going on in their world. If something big happens in their careers/businesses, you can congratulate them.

9. Give value and be valuable. The most important concept that will help you get the most out of your networking efforts is to understand that you can provide value to others without selling them your products or services.

**Providing value means helping others so that
they will look forward to helping you back.**

The kind of value I'm talking about here has nothing to do with "adding-value" or "value-adding" as an "incentive to buy", meaning you have to buy first in order to receive something extra from me. It's about being a problem solver by providing others with advice, ideas, tips, contacts, leads and referrals. When you do these things without expectations of how you will benefit in return, people will reward you with their patronage, referrals and support.

You strengthen relationships by giving value to them.

See my article entitled, ***"Inexpensive, Creative Ways to Build Business Relationships"*** on how to go about giving value and being valuable to your clients, prospects and networking associates.

10. Facilitate introductions.

A strong network is built when you help your contacts succeed. In doing so, you will be helping yourself to succeed. This is because creating opportunities for other people inspires them to do the same for you.

**Get in to the habit of passing along names — hairdresser, plumber,
real estate broker, lawyer, banker, etc. — not just to
anyone, but selectively with high praise.**

Instead of keeping your relationships to yourself, share them with other members of

your network. Help your clients and other contacts by connecting them to people, businesses, and groups who will in turn help them to achieve their goals. If you meet someone who would benefit from knowing someone you know, make the connection. See yourself as being at the center of your network and think of linking people you know who would benefit from knowing each other. Yes, you can connect people to each other via email or over the phone but it's always best if you can arrange a 3-way meeting where you can make the connection in person. Or, why not facilitate introductions on a bigger scale by creating some kind of event at which you bring a group of your contacts together to meet one another. When you get into the habit of introducing people and setting up new relationships, you will be perceived as a well-connected and valuable resource.

11. Give referrals to your clients and networking associates. Show them where they might be able to get new business.

There's no faster way to build a mutually beneficial business relationship than bringing in some business for the other party. If you proactively help your contacts to win new business (by recommending them and referring your contacts to them), you will start to notice that reciprocity can be a powerful thing for your business. There's no question that those who share their contacts, refer business on and give out leads receive more in return than individuals who keep their contact list close to their chest and wait for others to pass along a prospect or opportunity. Very simply, you're more likely to get referrals if you start referring business to others.

There is nothing that will build a bond between you and another business person faster than referring a new customer or client to that business person. When you help other people build their business (and achieve their own professional and financial goals) they will be moved to reciprocate by helping you to improve your business as well.

Give leads to your network contacts — or put them in front of others that might lead to business for them.

12. Don't forgo face-to-face networking.

By all means, embrace LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter to build relationships and enhance your reputation but don't use these and other web-based social connectors exclusively. There is no replacement for traditional face-to-face networking. Networking online certainly does not replace face-to-face networking and meetings. Personal interaction and communication with your clients and other contacts will always reap higher returns than simply using social media. Learn to balance the two forms of networking to maximise your return on your investment in networking and the relationships you build. Bring your most important *off-line* connections *on-line* by communicating with them personally via social media AND bring your most important *on-line* connections *off-line* by picking up the phone and calling them or meeting up with them in person for breakfast, a cup of coffee or a drink after work.

The internet has made it easier to connect and maintain contact with useful connections, but it's still not a substitute for building relationships in a more traditional face-to-face way.

13. Pay it forward by helping others to achieve success.

Those who are good at networking and building relationships are interested in helping others. By being a giver, you actually interest people in getting to know what you do. My motto is “give a bit more than you take”. I’m a giver by nature and I find that when I give more than I take, I receive more than I expect.

Take every opportunity to help others to be successful. Introduce them to potential clients and referral sources, recommend them, offer help and suggestions and send business their way. It’s a hallmark of leadership that generates goodwill and invokes reciprocity.

A strong network is built when you help your networking associates succeed and prosper. In doing so, you will be creating your own success. This is because helping others inspires them to do the same for you. When you are with your clients, referrals sources, prospects and other contacts or when you are on the phone or exchanging emails with them, think about how you can help them. Can you introduce them to a business opportunity or an opportunity to speak publicly or to be on a panel? Do you have some great resource that they could benefit from? What one piece of useful information or knowledge could you give them? Ask yourself “What can I do to help this person?”, “Who can I introduce this person to?” This is what makes networking work for you.

Building your network is not just about having people available to help you. It’s so that those people can depend on you to help them too.

14. Visit people.

Consider your top clients and referral sources. When was the last time you went to see them at their place of work? I cannot begin to count the number of times people have confided to me that they have never taken the time to meet an important client or key referrer on their turf. Go visit them...and get closer to them. While you’re there, ask to take a tour of the operation, learn about the business, meet other people in the company and ask good questions about the industry or company. Depending on the nature of the relationship, you could turn your visit into something social, like lunch or drinks or you could keep it on a business level by finding out how things went with the project you were involved in, reviewing a piece of work you’re in the middle of or providing a status report. Visiting the people who are important to your business shows how much you actually care about their business success, builds closer relationships with them and often leads to additional new business for your company or firm.

14. Your network doesn’t have to be huge, but it has to be deep. Building a strong, productive network takes time and effort. It is one thing to have hundreds of contacts on LinkedIn, but how many of those people would recommend and refer you? It’s not always about numbers. Yes, lots of contacts give you potential access to lots of people, but will they be interested in helping and supporting you? And just as important, are these people YOU have an interest in helping in some way? Those who are successful at networking spend a good chunk of their time building relationships — fostering existing ones and establishing appropriate new ones. They

are proactive in helping their network contacts succeed and prosper. They work to connect their contacts to others and they offer assistance with no expectation of anything in return.



16. Ask.

Many business owners and sales people continually pass up the opportunity to build their business. Train yourself at the conclusion of a successful job, project or assignment to ask for your client's business again and to suggest they pass your name along to others. Be sure your customers know that the experience of working with them was one you'd like to repeat and that you'd like more customers just like them.

Ask for personal introductions whenever possible as it is much easier to meet new people through a mutual contact. You're probably only an introduction or two away from your next big client. Try something like this: *If you ever hear of someone who needs bla bla bla then I'm happy for you to send them to me. I'll be pleased to look after them for you.*"

17. A big part of networking is following up those good connections you've made and developing the relationship.

How many times have you been along to a networking event and had some great conversations? You swapped business cards and promised to "stay in touch". You get back to work the next day, get stuck into your work and those good connections you made the day before soon become forgotten about and just another business card buried under the paperwork on your desk. Sound familiar? Neglecting to follow up with new contacts is one of the biggest mistakes people make with their networking. It's a waste of time to research and plan to meet new people, have engaging conversations and leave without contact information and plans to get in touch. Don't waste opportunities to make the most of in-person (first time) meetings.

If the contact agreed to meet at a later date, make a point to immediately firm up a meeting time. (See my article entitled, ***“Effective Follow-Up for Successful Business Networking”***)

To reap the benefits of networking, you have to become a master of follow up. Not everyone you meet will instantly want to do business with you or know of a friend who needs your product or services. You have to stay top of mind (in front of them) with emails, phone calls, text messages and in-person meetings.

17.5. Make following up easier while you’re talking.

When you meet someone at a business function and discover there’s an opportunity of some sort, invite the person to get together with you one-to-one for breakfast or lunch or simply for coffee so that you can *“hear more about what they do”* and *“brief them on some on some of the things you do for your clients/customers”*. The language you use can make all the difference. See my article entitled, ***“How to Enjoy and Make the Most of Networking Events”*** for some ideas about what to say in this situation.

There is one kind of follow-up that many of us find difficult to handle. This is when we send a business proposal and get no response. It’s as if our proposal went into a black hole. One of the keys to success here is to set the foundation for follow up when you give your prospect/client your proposal. You can ask, *“Can you give me a yes or no in a week or less? Or if you’re not sure, can you let me know if you have any questions? And if I don’t hear back from you, is it ok if I call you?”* Almost everyone will say yes, without hesitation. And when a week goes by and you haven’t heard from them (it happens to all of us) and you’ve already told them you’d call, you do. *“Hi. This is Sally. Since I hadn’t heard from you, I wanted to know if you had any questions about my proposal.”* Following up won’t jeopardise the proposal. But not following up could.

18. New contacts almost never become clients or referral sources as a result of a one-time meeting. Beyond an initial follow-up communication, you need to invest time and energy in building the relationship before it will bear any meaningful fruit. This means being proactive in staying in touch. It takes 5 -7 times or more, sometimes less, but rarely, exchanges/interactions using a mix of phone calls, email, texts and face-to-face meetings for someone to even consider giving or referring business to you. And each of your “exchanges” should be focused on ways to make their job or life easier, by helping them to solve problems, by connecting them to other people who can be helpful to them and by sending them helpful pieces of information/knowledge they can use to achieve their goals and overcome their challenges. Don’t call to ask your contacts if they are ready to buy but ask how you can help them. People buy from people and refer business to people they like, trust and rate. You must create that “like you, trust you, rate you” connection first. And that takes an investment of your time, but it is well worth your effort. Build the relationship *first* and trust that the business and referrals will come.

19. Spend time with the senior executives/management of your customers and clients. These people are the bosses of your key customer contacts — the MD, CEO, COO, CFO, CIO and other top level individuals. Typically, they aren't the ones that hand the business out or issue the contracts and order numbers you need to keep your revenues flowing, but It can be a huge plus the have good relationships at the top level if your main contact can't help you when something "goes wrong" or you're looking for critical information.

Build these important relationships before you need them.

Most sales people and managers only think to make contact with a senior executive of a customer when they want something or when there is a problem. Your contacts' bosses recognise this and consequently try to avoid you, either politely or by refusing to see you.

Make a list of those companies and firms you have sold to in the past 12 to 18 months. Next to each company name put down the name of your main contact's boss, the boss's boss and others with power. Any of these people who haven't been contacted in the last 3-4 months needs to be contacted immediately. Beyond saying "thank you for the business" your goal is to find out what problems, issues, concerns and aspirations they have and find out how you can help. A phone call is good, but face to face is a whole lot better when it comes to enhancing and maintaining relationships with senior executives.

Stay in touch with the senior people of your current customers and you will keep and grow your business with them.

20. Keep your momentum — put yourself out there EVERY DAY.

If you want to increase your clientele and grow your business, then focus your networking efforts in two areas:

- (a) meet people that you do not yet know, but should know and
- (b) nurture your existing network in order to deepen your connections

In point 14 of this article, I said "do something every day to keep your (networking) momentum going". This means doing both (a) and (b) above on a daily basis. And this takes a bit of explaining.

First, compile your **List of 20**. Your list of 20 is people that you don't yet know, but would like to know. They are 20 people that you feel if you knew well would have a significant positive impact on your ability to generate new business. Maybe you can't come up with 20 names right away, so just start with 2 or 3 and then maybe you'll start to think of another one and another one and another. But keep your list to around 20 because 20 are large enough that if you don't make a connection with one of them, you make a connection with another. And 20 names are large enough that your field of vision is expansive but are also small enough that you can really focus on all 20 of these people.

A big part of networking is working your network. Meaning you already know these people — you've met them a few times here and there or you know them very well — but either way, you have some connection to them and your job is to continue to deepen these relationships over time.

Second, compile your **Network of 80**. Your top 80 networking contacts are people you know already. And they are people who are influential in your target market, industry or space. So influential, that you feel if you had really deep connections with them you'd have all the new business, all the reorders and all the referrals you could handle. These people will be a mix of existing and past clients/customers, people who have referred business to you, leaders of industry/business associations and others who are important to your business. Take a few minutes right now to think about who these people are. Go through your contact list and keep writing down names until you hit a total of 80. (Don't know 80 people who can give or refer you business? See points **1, 2, 3** and **4** above.)

These two numbers — 20 and 80 — are small enough to manage and here's how you manage them *each* working day.....

Each day, reach out to the first person on your list of 20. You don't call them up and ask them to meet you for a coffee. That's too much, too soon. So you might comment (favorably) on a blog post or article they've written, on a speech or presentation they gave, on their professional bio or LinkedIn profile or perhaps on something you've seen in the news about them or a Google alert you received about the individual or his/her business. And once you've done that with the person who is number one on the list they go to the bottom of the list so that they become number 20. Number 20 becomes number 19 and number 2 becomes number 1. If you think about the math, that means that over the course of one month (20 working days) you're going to reach out to each person on your list of 20. And in a few short months you probably will start to develop some sort of relationship with these people where you can actively go out for a coffee with them or set up a meeting at their office.

Staying in touch personally is an important part of networking.

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems are NOT enough to build real relationships with people. You also need one-to-one communication from you to your clients and other contacts.

You need to be continually communicating with your network by reaching out to one person at a time, not 50 or 100 or more people. You can't expect to foster relationships, create and ensure reorders, and earn referrals if people think you see them as just one person on a long list of contacts.

Also, each day, you work your network of 80 contacts. Here's what you do each working day.....

— Each day you introduce two people on this list who don't know each other but you think should know each other and might find each other relevant. So it could be personally relevant or professionally relevant or both. Each day just introduce two people. For example: *"Hi Steve. I think you should meet Chris Johnson, CEO at (company name). Chris, I think you should meet Steve Harper, a guru in (area of expertise). Based on your mutual interest in on-line collaboration (or whatever), I think it would be worthwhile for you guys to connect. If you think there's some relevancy, give each other a shout. Here are your respective email addresses (business not personal).I'll let you take it from here. Enjoy! Best regards."* You do this each day.

The best way to build your network is to help other people build theirs.

— Each day you send a piece of *business-related* information — **not offers to buy your product or service** — to one of the people in your network of 80. Keep track of your top 80 contacts' business interests so you can send articles, announcements, cartoons, etc. that might interest, help or amuse them. As you go through your day, reading newspapers, newsletters, business journals, blogs, and other materials, keep an eye out for "items" that you can send to your top 80 contacts. If you come across something that is relevant to their business or industry situation send it along with a personal comment, *"Hi Mary. I just saw this article today about (whatever) and I know this is important to you. I was wondering if you'd seen it and what you thought about it. Best regards."* Not only does it show that you've been listening, but it demonstrates that you are thinking about the person, even when s/he is not standing right in front of you. Over time, this will become second nature and will take you no time at all. Why bother sending articles, etc.? Because not only does this say, "I was thinking of you and thought you might enjoy reading this article," it also keeps your name in front of potential/existing clients and referral sources without being too pushy about it. It's a personal touch that sets you apart from the competition and will bring you a lot of *additional* business and referrals over time.

Be top of mind by sharing ideas and information that can benefit members of your network, not offers to buy your product or service.

If you see a link that one of your contacts might appreciate, send it. Be sure to explain why the link made you think of your contact and how you thought it would be useful.

Also consider sending articles, cartoons, etc., that are related to a person's personal hobbies or interests. How might you know what these are? When you meet someone, look around their office. The golf memorabilia, tennis trophy, antique clock, even the plaque on the wall are a source of free information about that person.

— Each day you reach out with a *personal* message to a member of your network of 80 contacts. You can do this with a phone call, with an email, with a text message or

with a hand-written note. There is any number of *personal* reasons to touch base with your contacts, including:

to say “thank you for your business”. Make sure no one falls through the cracks by thanking every single client/customer when they sign up, at 2 weeks into service, at 6 months and at every anniversary. Sometimes it’s with a call. Sometimes it’s with a gift. And sometimes it’s with a hand-written note. You are also thankful for gifts such as time, effort, expertise, information, loyalty and referrals.

to show your appreciation to them. This is different than saying thank you. To appreciate means to value and recognise the significance of an act, idea or object. You would send an email, write a note or send a card of appreciation for any type of support, demonstrations of regard and acknowledgements.

to provide professional leads. When you hear of something, let appropriate people in your network know. Think not only jobs and business referrals but also committees, board positions, speaking opportunities, writing assignments and special projects. Offer to provide an introduction if you’re comfortable doing so.

to console them. Expressing your caring to someone in disappointment, loss, sadness, etc., shows the recipient that you actually DO care.

to congratulate them. This is a great type of communication to receive because it shares the sender’s delight in one’s good fortune. Members of your network of 80 can be congratulated on all kinds of accomplishments, including promotions, achievements, awards, milestones, and so on.

to ask their opinion. Your contacts will be happy to help you out with their knowledge and experience, if you ask. Be sure to show your gratitude and offer to help them back. As appropriate, use the opportunity to catch up on other matters and provide an update on your own status during the exchange.

to compliment them. What is sweeter to our ears (and eyes, if you’re reading) than a sincere compliment? Not much, and in our tough, competitive world where complaints and disparagements are often louder than applause, a little positive feedback can be very welcome indeed.

to recognise them. If you’ve ever had your name (or photo) in the newspaper, you know what a thrill it is. Just imagine how much greater that thrill would be if you knew that others had seen it, too. But recognition doesn’t have to be confined to media coverage; you can also recognise someone for a job well done.

to say happy birthday, happy anniversary, merry Christmas or happy new year
People like to be remembered, so it makes sense to honor a significant date by making a personal call or sending a personal card. This really shows how much you value the relationship. Example: Michael M is CEO of an industry association here in Perth. He has held this position for 26 years. My wife Sam and I celebrated our 6th wedding anniversary recently and here’s a text message I received from Michael on our special day: *“6 red roses might be appropriate today young Ron even though iron is the traditional gift and wood is the more contemporary one. May the romance continue for you and Sam. Have a great day together. Best wishes Michael and Debra.”* Michael always remembers my wedding anniversary and I really like that.

**While many of us are adept at building up our networks
we don’t spend enough time nurturing them.**

to invite them. Since many people automatically discard anything that looks remotely like bulk mail, if you really want someone to come to an event, a personal invitation is about the most flattering way you can invite someone. Pick up the phone and make the call first and then follow up with a written invitation.

to encourage them. Perhaps a client/contact is going through major stresses that are affecting his/her job. Or maybe you need to encourage someone to start their own business, go on a holiday, to follow their dreams. If you can relate to any of these circumstances or dozens of other different scenarios, you know that a word of encouragement can be just the tonic, the inspiration to help people achieve their goals.

to celebrate them. When speaking with members of your network of 80, if you hear of a baby being born, a big case won, a daughter getting engaged or an award being accepted, it's time to celebrate. Send a congratulation email, note or card from your entire staff.

to recommend a product or service. When someone does a great job for you, or when you buy a piece of equipment that you're really happy with, or when you discover an excellent publication or when you attend a useful seminar/exhibition ask yourself, who in my network of 80 should know about this and let them know.

just to say hello and ask how they are going. You don't have to have an explicit reason to reach out to a connection Shoot one of your contacts a note or text message. Ask them how they are doing, how their families are and what is going on in their career/business. Let them know that you don't actually need anything, but you are just touching base to see how they are doing. How good would that make you feel if someone you knew just dropped you a note that said they were thinking of you and wanted to say hello? That would make me feel pretty good.

to say hello when you're on a holiday. Send a postcard, email or text message to your contacts with friendly greetings from the Bahamas or wherever you might be on vacation.

to say bon voyage. If you know someone in your network of 80 is heading off on a holiday make contact to wish them an enjoyable and safe journey.

80% of building and maintaining relationships as a source of direct business, or of referrals is just staying in touch.

Think about it. That's **4** people — introducing **2** people + sharing some business related information with **1** person + sending a personal message to **1** person. **4** people each working day. Over the course of one month (20 working days), you reach out to every one in your network of 80.

So you're staying in touch with each person in that network of 80 every single month. And by staying in touch with each contact, one person at a time, you're keeping the personal touch and staying fresh in their minds. You're building deeper and deeper relationships with a core group of people who can have a significant positive impact on the future growth of your business, not spinning your wheels and getting little or no results from the increasingly expensive and ineffective bulk mail/mass marketing activities that most businesses do.

**Even in this day and age, personal relationships
are still at the core of business success.**

CRM systems can help facilitate relationship-building and play an important role in your B-to-B business development and marketing strategy. But when your bd and marketing communications plan also includes real, personal, human communication *to one person at a time*, you have a much better chance of building relationships that last.

Stay in personal touch with people who are important to your business. When clients and customers do not feel cared for, they are more likely to try someone else. It's the same with your referral sources. Ignore them and they'll refer their friends elsewhere.

See my article entitled, ***"Inexpensive, Creative Ways to Build Business Relationships"***. You'll discover 44 goodwill-building ways to stay in touch and nurture your connections.

21. Are you on LinkedIn?

— You've collected all those contacts, now what are you going to do with them? Here's a good idea. Find three of your contacts on LinkedIn that you have not spoken to in a while. Shoot each one of them a note. Ask them how they are doing, how their families are and what is going on in their career or how their business is going. Let them know that you don't actually need anything, but you are just checking in to see how they are doing. Again, how good would that make you feel if someone you haven't spoken to in a while just dropped you a note that said they were thinking of you and wanted to say hello? That would make me feel pretty good. Spread a little joy today and reach out to some of those contacts you've lost contact with. It is always good to stay fresh on people's minds. And while you're at it, tack on a few lines about what's new with you, but no selling! That is how opportunities find you even when you are not looking for them. Send three notes today and keep sending three notes each week until you have reached out to all of your contacts.

— Ask your LinkedIn contacts to meet you in person. See point 7 on page 12 of this article.

Don't be lazy when sending invitations to connect on LinkedIn. Write a personalised message instead of the standard message that LinkedIn provides.

— When you invite someone to become part of your network on LinkedIn, don't use the standard message that LinkedIn automatically gives you to send to your potential new contact. If you truly want to connect with someone, take the time to send a personal note to establish the connection. Most everyone uses the standard message that LinkedIn provides when asking me to connect. It makes me think they're just trying to connect to as many people as possible, rather than looking to nurture a professional relationship with me. It's time to stand out people! It does not

take much effort to draft a personalised note inviting someone to connect with you on LinkedIn, but it can truly make you stand out from the crowd.

Here are two good examples of a personalised message I received recently from people to join them on LinkedIn. *“Hi Ron. I’m just creating my profile on LinkedIn and would like to add you to my network so that I can stay in contact with you. I’ll be in touch shortly to make a time for us to catch up for coffee. Best regards. Belinda.”*
..... *“Hello Ron. It was great to meet you yesterday at the AAMIG event. As a person I would value staying in touch with, I would like to add you to my LinkedIn contacts. Kind regards. Stephen.”*

Tip: Read a person’s profile before sending them a personal message to connect. This will help you to craft your invitation and make it compelling to accept.

— When you accept an invitation (from someone you know, but not very well), you really want to sow the seeds for developing the connection further. Example: *Hi Mary. Good to hear from you and thank you for your invitation to connect on LinkedIn. I’m more than happy to accept and look forward to the opportunity to learn more about you and your work/business and how we might assist each other in the future. How about we meet up for a coffee sometime? Best regards.”*

**As a rule, I will only connect with people I actually know
or trusted business contacts.**

— When you accept an invitation to connect on LinkedIn from someone you know really well, someone you trust, you might say something like this, *“Hi Ray, Good to hear from you and thank you for inviting me to become part of your network. Now that we’re “linked in” take a look at my list of contacts and if there are any to whom you’d like an introduction, let me know. If I am able and the timing is right, I will facilitate the connection for you. Best regards.”*

— Acknowledge and welcome your new connections with a personal reply. It only takes a few seconds. You might say something like, *“Hi Jack. Thank you for accepting my invitation to join me on LinkedIn. Let’s fix a time to meet for a cup of coffee and swap updates on what we’re both doing and see if there’s anything we can do to help each other in the future? What do you say?”*

— When I get an invitation from someone I don’t know, I will usually respond with the following: *“Hi Mary. Thank you for your invitation to join your network. Please don’t be upset, but at this moment I’m not able to accept as I don’t think we have met. If I’m wrong, I hope you will forgive me and tell me where and when we did meet. If we don’t know each other, it would be really good to know why you have sent your invitation. When you become part of my network I want to feel comfortable in recommending and introducing you to all my contacts. I know you will appreciate this would be difficult for me if we haven’t actually met. Online or offline, networking to me is about building lasting mutually beneficial relationships. I do hope you will understand my thinking here. You might think I’m a snob or just plain rude, but this is a protocol I have adopted when using LinkedIn to avoid the users and spammers in*

our world. I'd like to think however that if we were to meet, we can establish a real connection allowing us to build a long-lasting business relationship. Let's know if you'd like to catch up for a coffee sometime. Best regards"

I wonder why people ask me to join their network on LinkedIn when they don't give me a reason. Do they want to mine my contacts for marketing? Do they want to broadcast to my network? Or do they really want to connect with me and build a real relationship? What do they want to use my connections for? Hmmmm.

Perhaps you might prefer to use one of the following abridged versions of the above. *"Hi Mary. Thank you for your invitation to join your network. Please don't be upset but before I accept I would like to confirm where we met as I cannot recall meeting you. A protocol I have adopted when using LinkedIn to avoid the users and spammers in our world and protect the important business connections I have, is to "connect" online only with people whom I know with the aim of building a mutually beneficial professional relationship with them. Perhaps you could come back to me with your thoughts on how we could mutually benefit from our relationship and then we could get together for a coffee to talk further. Best regards."*

— Don't add a connection's email address to your email database without asking permission. Just because they agree to connect with you, doesn't mean they want to receive your email marketing.

Here are some closing tips that will help you with your networking:

- Go alone. Although you might feel more comfortable attending functions, conferences and industry events with a colleague or as part of a group, this can limit your opportunities. Hanging out with people you know can prevent you from branching out and talking to other people or even make you less easy to approach.
- Give. Give. Give. Help people as much as you can. You will receive multi-fold — not necessarily from the people to whom you give, but you *will* receive.
- Always sit with someone you don't know at an event.
- Call a colleague and ask what kind of leads they're looking for. If they don't faint, they'll be pleasantly surprised. And, they'll think of you next time they are handing out leads.
- At the start of each week, write your networking goals and action plan for that week. It will make your networking much more productive because you'll know exactly why you're taking each step.
- Actively seek new ways to give leads to others.
- Have fun. Networking is the easiest, most enjoyable way to build not only a client base, but a support foundation that will see you through good and bad times.
- Business networking is an art, which has to be worked at and practiced continually.

Thank you for reading this article. I hope you found the information in it helpful.

**Do you know a friend or colleague who might benefit from reading this article?
Share it freely with your network.**

And now I invite you to learn more. This article is just a sample of the work I do to help companies and individuals gain more clients and increase referrals and word-of-mouth recommendations. Email gonetworking@iinet.net.au or call me on +61 413 420 538 to explore the potential of us working together.

Footnote

There's a thing called Dunbar's Number. And that is the number of people that the average person can maintain an ongoing relationship with, either in business or in their personal life. It's often quoted as 150 people. But others have proven that number is somewhere between 100 and 230. In other words most people have over 100 and up to 230 close friends and acquaintances. If you then add their virtual friends that they are connected to via LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook and other similar social networks, then the figure escalates into the mid hundreds and even thousands. What this means is that when you get to meet just one person at a networking gathering, you are actually talking to the key to the hundreds and maybe thousands of people in their network. Knowing this and understanding it is the secret to business networking — it's about the referrals people can give you.

Go to a networking event, where there are 30 people and in effect you are looking at 30 keys to maybe 20,000, 30,000 or 40,000 potential clients and customers. Each of which will also have their own network, possibly in the thousands. It's a bit like the six degrees of networking principle which says that everyone on the planet is only six people away from everyone else on the planet.

So the key to turning networking events into real business-building opportunities is to go there to connect with people, not to sell to them...or to get their business card so you can then call or email them later and sell to them. **That's not how it works!** Your goal is to build a good relationship with the people you meet by following up and staying in touch with them. Ensure that they understand what your products/services/solutions are, what they do and who they are for. If you get the relationship right and your message is easily understood, your networking associates will happily refer you. And, if they recognize that they struggle from the problems you can solve, they'll happily buy from you too.

Better networking and deeper relationships = more business.

"We can attribute tens of millions of dollars in additional sales and new business to the networking skills training programs Ron Gibson has run for our people." Norm Roberts. General Manager, Mobile Lending Perth CBD. ANZ Banking Group.

Referred to as "That Networking Guy" by many organizations, Ron Gibson provides in-depth networking training and coaching, focusing on business growth and development. Get Ron to speak at your next conference or sales meeting about how to network your business for growth. Call Ron on 0413 420 538 or email gonetworking@iinet.net.au