

Make Networking Work

By [Sandy Geroux](#) ★

I've been to many networking events where introductions are routinely done near the beginning of the meeting. Yet at most of these events, despite the awesome opportunity to make a big impression and become memorable to the group, most professionals go through a weak, unimpressive litany of what they do... and end up sounding like every other professional in their industry (and most in the room), and failing to make a memorable impression.

Contrast this with the Event Promoter who had such a catchy "jingle" that when he stood up to give his elevator speech, everyone in the room recited it with him! Or the Children's Party Clown who blew a funny whistle before introducing himself, then stood up with a red nose on his face. Or the car wash/car detailing company owner who stood up and blew bubbles in the air as he introduced himself... and then gave a bottle of bubbles containing his company name and contact information to everyone in the crowd. Or the business adviser who gave out casino-style chips with the words, "Don't gamble with your business" printed on one side and his contact information on the other.

Compare the humdrum words of those who merely state their name, occupation, and company name (as if stating name, rank and serial number) to the lawyer who stood up and said, "If you're working with a lawyer (or trying to work with a lawyer) who isn't calling you back, call me. I'll call you back!" BAM! In one sentence, he let everyone in the room know he knew one of the biggest customer problems in his industry - and let us know that he had a solution for it. I contacted him myself (because I was experiencing this problem at that very time!); I later referred another client to him, who eventually put him on retainer with his company... simply because he let me know at our very first meeting that he could solve one of the biggest problems with lawyers!

Compare this, as well, to the people who toss unfamiliar jargon around in their introduction, leaving the rest of us scratching our heads trying to figure out what they actually do!

Many of us spend an awful lot of time driving to, attending and driving back from networking events because relationships are the name of the game in this competitive climate. What are you doing to differentiate yourself right from your introduction, let your customers know you understand their problems, show them that you ARE the solution to those problems - and get them to notice and remember you?

Let's look at some important concepts when networking and trying to make an impression, so we can ensure that our time and effort are not wasted:

1. **If I don't know what you do, I can't use or recommend your services.** Don't toss around jargon, abbreviations or terms that people outside your industry don't recognize or understand. Never assume that everyone has the same knowledge you do. If you must use an acronym or industry term, be sure to explain it by saying, "In other words..." or "which is just a fancy way of saying..." (remember that using humor ALWAYS helps!) Explaining terms never hurts; but not explaining them will practically ensure that someone will not know them and will not ask, for fear of looking foolish for not knowing their meaning.

2. **If I don't know what to listen for after the meeting, nothing will trigger my memory so I can recommend you.** Don't simply tell people what you do; tell them what situations occur out in the real world with which you can help. For example, the financial adviser who started out telling us he "worked with business-people and entrepreneurs to help them with their financial needs" wasn't helping me recommend his services until he came to a meeting one day and said, "If you know of someone who has just had a change in their life circumstances, such as having a baby, getting married or divorced, or retiring, they can use my services." BAM again! Hearing the words and situations I could listen for out in the real world helped trigger my memory that my neighbor had just had a baby... and I could then make the recommendation. What life circumstances, conversations and words can you have others listen for outside of the networking meeting that would trigger their memory of you and what you can provide, so they can recommend you?
3. **If you don't make a memorable impression, I will forget I saw you at the meeting.** Most business is not closed right at networking meetings... it's closed after them, by people who connect, begin and nurture a relationship and create trust with each other. Remember: one meeting does not a relationship make. However, you can't even begin a relationship if you don't get someone to notice you and become interested in you in the first place.
4. **Follow up with people after the meeting is over.** Once you do begin a relationship, nurture it - don't stick people's business cards in a drawer and forget about them. However, don't assume you can send automatic e-mails, such as newsletters, either. Always get permission to send automated items... and make personal contact occasionally through hand-written notes, cards, clippings, and phone calls.
5. **When you do follow up (or even when you first meet someone), seek to serve rather than to receive.** Ask people what you might be able to do to help them, connect them with a resource you may have, or give advice without expecting anything in return. Remember the old adage: "People don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care." The principle of giving back is wonderful; the principle of giving before is better. When you show others you're willing to give, they respond in kind and give back to you.

The whole purpose of taking the time to network with others is to establish relationships, begin communications and build trust and rapport... all of which help others as well as helping you build your business over time.

Networking events are not sales efforts per se, in that they don't always (or even usually) produce results immediately. Effective, high-impact sales efforts are still needed to continue to build "NOW" business.

But if you don't want to waste your time when networking, you must do it effectively. This will build future business quickly and effectively... making it much easier to foster those relationships and have them come to fruition when the future becomes the "now."

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