

Business networking tips



Usually when people start a business they are told to 'go networking' to get clients, but they have no idea what is involved or how to be effective

In this session we'll cover the many advantages of face to face networking, but also the unknown fact that catches many people out and results in them giving up thinking it doesn't work.

By the end of this session you will have an understanding of the benefits from face to face networking, and how to easily get started.

Before we start and I talk about all the good benefits, it is important to understand that it is perfectly ok to feel that you do not want to do this and to even hate the idea at the moment!

When people are surveyed about their fears two of the top ones are walking into a room full of strangers and public speaking. Networking combines both of these so it is ok to be apprehensive – almost everyone at a networking meeting felt exactly the same way when they started.

I do highly recommend face to face business networking and am going to show you some of the benefits in this session, but if you really **really** don't want to do it then there are online alternatives available now.

One key point that makes people think networking doesn't work is their incorrect belief that they are there to sell on the day. Many times I've seen people come to an event, rush round handing out business cards and leave thinking that they have been networking.

The purpose of networking is to make connections that could lead to possible business - likely by referral, rather than make a sale to them on the day. That's an important point that is often missed. You may get business from the connections of the people in the room, rather than the people there themselves.

At one large networking event in London, with 500 attendees, the presenter asked the audience 'who is here to sell today?' and most of the hands went up. He then asked 'who is here to buy today?' and out of 500 people only a few hands went up... so there can be quite a difference in expectations.

Benefits of networking

When you go networking it is important to set out what you want to achieve from an event.

Some popular goals are:

New business - are you looking to network so that you can actually bring in some more clients for your business?

Visibility & connections - to help your clients, is it just something that you are doing to let people in the local area know about your business? Also you may be looking to make connections so that you can refer your clients to other professionals.

Socialising - running a business can be a lonely time for some people moving from employment, are you networking so that you can meet like-minded business owners?

Public speaking – many networking events give you the option to speak about your business to the group for a minute, this can be a great opportunity to develop your public speaking skills in a supportive environment. Remember most people will have not wanted to do this when they came to their first meeting, but have developed their skills over time.

Developing your business – by meeting with other professionals you can bounce ideas of them and refine your business. Even just speaking about your own business regularly to others helps this. However, you should only do this in general terms, it's not a way to get loads of free advice. If you could benefit from their professional services on a deeper level, then you should engage them on a paying basis.

My top 4 tips for new networkers

When you start out networking it can be somewhat daunting, so here are my top 4 tips to make things easy for you

arrive early - there will be less people there so it won't be as off-putting, plus you will create a good impression by being early – sometimes I have been a guest at a meeting and been there well before some of the members arrived.

seek out open groups - when you are looking at groups of people standing together look to see if the group is open or closed. By that I mean look to see if there is a space for someone to join in, or if they are huddled together. A closed group means they are not looking to connect outside, perhaps they are having a private discussion. An open group should welcome you into the conversation.

look for people on their own - If you are stuck for someone to talk to, look out for people on their own and go up to them – they will welcome the approach as they are probably unsure themselves.

stand by the sign in desk or coffee table - that way you are guaranteed a stream of people coming past you. They may even assume you are part of the event and chat with you.

Business cards

Whatever your goal from networking, business cards are another factor of meetings – either they'll be passed round the room for everyone to take one or you will want to give them out individually when you make a connection.

I have already covered the important points about how people should contact you, but in summary your business card should carry:

Your name

business summary - what you do and where you are based (rather than a job title, it is a good opportunity to include your summary 1 or 2 sentences instead.) I have had a card from someone that didn't have their name or any other details. Perhaps they thought it was clever marketing, but after trying to find them online I gave up – many wouldn't even have bothered.

email - You may want to give your email address, or maybe use a contact form on your website before giving it out. Unfortunately, some people you meet at networking events seem to think that having your business card means that they can subscribe you to their newsletter.

your website address

quality print - there are many options for good quality printing online, where small quantities of cards can be ordered if needed. In the past you had to order hundreds.

Make sure that you choose a quality paper for the card, and avoid the supplier's logo on the reverse (sometimes you have to choose not to have this in the ordering process.)

bring them! Of course the most important thing to do with your cards is to actually bring them. If you forget them then they are no good. Many people keep a supply in the car and perhaps some in the pocket of a jacket they are likely to be wearing.

In this session we have covered an introduction and how to get started with business networking. It's a subject with many levels, and indeed there are many books and courses available if you want to go deeper.

This session is extracted from my course 'starting and growing a business easily, with low risks and costs.' You can find the full course on udemy:

<https://www.udemy.com/starting-your-own-business-easily-with-low-risks-and-costs/?couponCode=ebook>