

Networking - Excuses, Obstacles, Rewards

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If you are in business, your mission includes reaching out to prospects that have a need you can fill. If you want to keep the doors to your business open, you can't hide under a rock or in a cave and expect prospects to beat a path to your secret lair. You have to reach out in effective ways to let people know who you are and how you can solve their critical problems.

One of the easiest and most immediate ways to market your business is through personal networking. You can hire a business development person to do this for you. But if it's your business (no matter if you have 0 employees or 110 employees) you still need to get out there and take a pulse on the market, make connections and create the opportunities.

Not everyone is a strong advocate of networking. It takes some effort, commitment and time. I talk to a lot of people who have a myriad of excuses why they can't do networking. I agree there are plenty of excuses and obstacles to keep all of us away from live networking completely. See if you recognize even a few of these:

It takes time away from work

It takes time away from my family

It costs too much

It's too far way - inconvenient, wrong direction, I don't know how to get there

I get stuck in rush hour traffic to get there

There's no parking/Parking costs too much to attend

I don't like the food/There's no food

I don't drink/ I don't golf/There's no beer/wine

I don't know anyone going

I'm not a member

I don't know what to say

I went once, it didn't work for me

I admit that on occasion a few of these slip in to my self-talk too.

On the flip side, there are terrific rewards for investing the time and effort in networking. See if any of these benefits sound appealing:

It's fun and friendly- people are there to meet new people, to explore connections and set up follow-up meetings.

You meet many people fast - so often isn't it timing that makes things come together?

You meet people who in some way are pre-qualified for your product or service by being members of the group or attending that particular meeting.

People who attend networking events have an agenda and they will tell you why they are there - the openness and directness is so productive.

Something leads to something - whether you are looking for clients, vendors, professional services, a new job, or contacts at a particular company; if you put it out there, you are bound to get a few hits (6 Degrees of Separation Theory). If you keep your product/service a secret, no one can know how great you/your company are.

Practice/refine your elevator speech - here's an event where you'll get to practice in front of a group at least once, and 1-on-1 at least another few times around the room. You get to do it in the time it would take to introduce yourself to one new prospect from a cold call.

- attending networking events regularly, you will build up rapport with people as they get to **Professional friendships** know, respect and trust you.

Get your nose out of your day-to- day business and get a pulse on the marketplace - clients won't come to you unless they know you can take away their pain. Networking gives you a chance to assess the market and know where the trends are headed.

The most important time to network is when you don't need clients or a job. It takes a good six months of networking actively and consistently to see an impact, which is where the consistency comes in.

Now here's the newest form of networking that is taking off around the globe - online networking. If you have not plugged in to any of the online groups you are missing out. Many have a free option. Here are a few strong ones I belong to:

www.linkedin.com

www.ecademy.com

www.meetup.com

www.twitter.com

www.facebook.com

www.blitztime.com

If you'd like to join my network on any of them, send me an email and I'll send you the invitation link. The key to effectiveness online is to stay in touch. Especially on twitter and facebook, that means a couple times a week if not daily.

These online networking groups are more responsive in many ways than a lot of the forums and email lists. On many of them, if you respond or engage with people, you increase yourself worth in the eyes of the group.

There is a difference. Online, you are casting a broad net, less selectively. In live networking, you can be very selective in choosing which group you attend and who you speak to in that group.

Here are two books on networking with an emphasis on online networking:

Endless Referrals - by Bob Burg

Dig Your Well Before You're Thirsty - by Harvey McKay

Networking can become addictive, once you get over the excuses. Remember, it's only one step in the process. You still need to bring people through your marketing funnel.