

NETWORK LIKE A PRO

16 TOP TIPS TO BUILD YOUR BUSINESS NETWORKING

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Network like a Pro

16 Top Tips

Hello :)

Hopefully you're here because you're starting to think that Business Networking may be a good way to get your name out, and help you grow your business. If that's the case, good news, It is!

My name is Peter Mols, and I'm on a mission to help people and businesses grow. I've attended hundreds of Networking events in my time and wish that I'd read a guide like this at the start of my journey in Networking, and won Networker of the Year 2022.

In this guide you'll find 16 tips to help you get off to a great start and ensure that your first experience of Networking is a positive, fun and enjoyable experience.

Onwards and upwards my friend.

Px



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1. Prepare for a marathon, not a sprint

The first, and probably most important thing, to know about business networking is that it takes time. If you think you'll turn up to your first networking event and get business there and then, I'll let you into a little secret. It's highly unlikely. That doesn't mean to say it's impossible - it's not, but it is just highly unlikely.

It will stand you in good stead to understand that your success in networking will follow your success in building trusting relationships.

Building trusting relationships takes time, energy and commitment, just like any other relationship in your life. Networking, as a marketing strategy, can pay huge dividends, but in my experience, the people who go to networking only when they need to are the ones that seldom make it. People smell desperation and self-interest a mile off, and for networking to work for you, you must be prepared to be patient, give it time, don't rush and don't push.

Prepare for a marathon - you'll never cross that finish line if you don't put in the training, no sweat pants required, a business-like appearance will suffice.





2. Understand Know, Like & Trust

Business networking is a brilliant way to quickly expand your network and to meet new people. There's a well known and fundamental law in business that is as relevant with general business as it is in the success of your networking:

“To win at the game of business, people must first know you, then like you, before they finally trust you.”

Only at the point of trust will anyone do business with you. Networking can help you expedite the “know” and “like” phase dramatically. The “know” phase can occur either by a serendipitous meeting with a potentially great person, or through a referral from someone you meet through networking to one of their contacts. It's important to note that under normal circumstances, you may need to be in the same “room” as someone on several occasions (and possibly as many as 10) before you even get to the “know” phase.

To get someone to “like” you will depend on all sorts of criteria but can take a long time and is another subject in its entirety - I'm not a personality coach after all. The absolute best way to move through the phases quickly is to follow up and arrange to have a coffee, and get to know each other better.





3. Communicate with the host

If you want to get off to a flying start, make sure that you've figured out who the host is; better still, reach out to them and say hello. Think about it, the host/organiser is the person in the middle of the group you're about to step into.

The host likely knows a great deal of the people in the group.

Who they are, what they do, and who they work with.

Taking the time to get to know the host could help you jump a number of steps and get introduced to people you'll get on with, or that may be interested in what you do. The host can also give you a bit of a background to the event and a much better idea of what you can expect.

Good manners cost nothing. You wouldn't attend any other kind of gathering and not make contact with the host, would you?

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4. Research the regulars

When you move to a new town, city, or village, you know a few visits to the local pub will help you meet the regulars who know everyone and everything you need to know. It's not that different from networking.

If the group's been around for some time, there will likely be some sort of online presence that you can use to your advantage.

You might be able to do some digging and find out who some of the regular visitors or members are. You may even find that you know people who already attend the group. It's a good idea too, as it will give you the potential to think up some good questions or establish common ground.

We have the World Wide Web at our fingertips, use it to board the express train!



Networking in... is really something special. It's a place to connect, a place to LEARN and a place to smile. Every event/session/connection leaves me motivated, rejuvenated and ready to take on the world and move my business forward.

Nicola Dean | Non Plastic Beach





5. Be crystal clear on what you do

Perfect planning prevents poor performance... heard that before?

One of the key traits of successful Networkers is a clear understanding of their offering, how what they do helps people and the type of person who generally gets the most benefit from what they do.

It's likely that you'll be required to introduce yourself multiple times at your event, possibly to the whole room, as well as numerous times in smaller circles. Having a clear statement that you've practised ahead of time will stand you in very good stead.

I don't mean that to sound like you're attending a self-help group where you have to repeat your recovery mantra - just know your subject and be prepared.

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6. Remember that we're all naked underneath

As I said in the opening, for most people, the fear of public speaking is real. But no matter how nervous you're feeling, the likelihood is that almost everyone in the room is either feeling the same, or can empathise with you.

It can be tough turning up to a new group that's got a bunch of people who know each other. It's likely that you'll experience inside jokes and feel left on the outside.

We all like to feel safe and sound in our tribes and for that reason, you'll likely witness groups of people sitting/standing together with a sense of familiarity.

Hey! It's okay. You might not want to picture anyone in their underwear, or goodness forbid, naked. But it's the truth.

Underneath those confident exteriors, we are all just skin and bones.





7. Be humble (and a little bit vulnerable)

Nobody likes a show-off.

It's as true of a Networking event as it is in the school yard. It doesn't matter how big a business you own, or what the size of the deals are that you do, if you want to get the most from the group, don't focus on how good you are.

Your job at your first Networking event is to be accepted into the group, you'll have a much better chance of blending in if you concentrate more on the other people than you do on yourself.

You'll never get the cold shoulder at a group for telling them that it's your first time. There will always be people happy to share the benefit of their experience, whether you want to hear it or not.

Listen, look, and learn. You might end up learning about the kind of business person or Networker you don't want to be!





8. Set at least one goal

The way you're feeling right now, simply attending a Networking event may be a massive win, and just getting to the end of the event may be a huge goal.

I get it. But if you're going to spend your time and money to hopefully meet people who'll help your business in some way, you need to have a think about what you want to achieve from the people you connect with.

A good goal that you might set for your first visit might be to initiate a minimum of three conversations, and follow up with at least one person.

It's all about the maths, and probabilities of conversion - and being jolly good on the phone, or via email.

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9. Arrive calm

First impressions count.

Depending on the type of event, location, or even if it's face to face or online, you'll do yourself a massive favour by making sure you've got the information you need ahead of time.

If it's face to face, make sure you leave in good time, know where you're going (and parking) but if it's online, make sure you have the joining links and know how to use the software (a quick google search will tell you all you need).

If you were ever in the Scouts or Brownies it will have been drummed into you to be prepared, but on this occasion, you won't need a clean hanky, safety pin, string, plastic bag, coin, or pencil and paper in your pockets. Although, a couple of those might help.





10. Take notes

Depending on how good your memory is, you might not remember all the people you meet at the event or how you thought they could help you at the time.

A simple trick is to scribble a few notes on the back of their business card so that later, when you want to follow up, you can easily recall who they were.

For example, you could scribble 'prospect' on the back of a potential client's business card or 'introduce to XYZ' on the business card of a person you think you can help.

Or 'avoid'- at all costs this one's a pitch-slapper.



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11. Put on your big pants

Let's not beat around the bush. Being in a room full of people that you don't know is intimidating, especially when your success is correlated to the number of people you get to know over the course of the event.

While it may seem impossible, you can actually stop yourself from overthinking. Don't allow your negative thoughts to get to you. More often than not they're lying to you. So take one big breath, and affirm that everything is going to be okay.

Be bold, be brave, because everyone else is in the same boat as you. Pull up your breeches and grab your braces. You've got this.





12. Smile

You know that warm feeling you get when you smile?

Well, you can pass it around the room because smiles are contagious.

Smiling puts you at ease and it also puts other people at ease.

It also makes you appear more approachable, meaning that people will be more willing to walk up to you and introduce themselves.

We said to be prepared, so make sure you've got your teeth in!



If like me you have been daunted by the prospect of networking, a little shy of putting yourself out there, then Pete and Sarah will definitely change your thinking. I have never been in a business networking environment where there is so much warmth and friendliness.

Danielle Beeken | By Kindly Ltd.



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13. Follow up

Networking is about the quality of connections built, not the quantity of business cards acquired.

When you leave the event, ensure you follow up with your connections within 48 hours.

Chances are, you'll be fresh in their memory then and you won't have to run through introductions all over again.

Alternatively, you could send them a LinkedIn request during or right after the event.

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14. Don't pitch slap

I'm sure all of us have had at least one friend, who messages or calls out of the blue after ten years of no contact.

After the salutations, the penny drops. They've joined some pyramid scheme and want to 'bring you on board'.

If you attend a Networking event and try to flog your business or services to a potential contact who you've only just met, you will get a well deserved metaphorical slamming down of the telephone!

You are there to build relationships, not sell your wares from a cardboard box.



I've come to many events now and am never disappointed by the quality of content that Outside Ideas produce.

Their network encourages a different level of business relationships and has been an invaluable asset to our company.

Natalie King-Bernard | Green Machine Computers





15. Ask good questions

Questions that elicit a yes or no response aren't good for starting conversations.

For instance instead of asking; 'are you a business owner?' you should ask 'What line of business are you in?'

Open-ended questions allow for more in-depth conversation as they require the person responding to provide a more detailed answer than a simple yes or no.

Open-ended questions enhance conversation flow and allow you to be an active listener because you get to focus on the explanation a person is giving you and therefore spend less time worrying about what question to ask next.





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16. Understand givers gain

Networking is about giving.

The people who are the best Networkers are lavish with their introductions and look to help rather than to receive. There's an unwritten law in Networking that those who are most lavish with their contacts, connections and referrals are generally the people who receive the most in return...

Imagine. We are slowly starting to build a relationship, and I make a referral from one of my contacts to you.

I'll make a small investment in your emotional bank account.

You may not immediately reciprocate, however, if I continue to refer my contacts to you there will come a tipping point when I've invested enough in your emotional bank account.

At that point, you'll actively start looking to refer leads to me.

If you do nothing else. look to give if you want to gain.





Summing up

Networking is a marathon, not a sprint. You'll need to invest time in building and maintaining all the connections you make at the events you attend.

As I mentioned earlier, people do business with people that they know, like, and trust. This means that you shouldn't expect to reap immediate returns from networking, rather you should cultivate all your connections and aim to stay in touch with people you already know.

I run a networking event on the first and third Wednesdays of each month. If you'd like to come along and meet some amazing people,

You can find out more at:

www.outside-ideas.com/networking-in





Welcome to Networking in...

The friendliest online business network in our corner of the internet

Ni... was built to celebrate entrepreneurship & help owners who are looking to grow with a supportive online business networking group.

There are NO funny rules to follow, NO subscriptions & NO pressure...

Our events are friendly, inclusive, informative & diverse.

Just book on, turn up, bring a smile & get involved.

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ONWARDS & UPWARDS...

It's fair to say that my first experience of Business Networking was a little overwhelming. It was early 2007 and I'd recently been to a "grow your business" event put on by the council. I'd met some other people in start-up mode as well as some that had been around the block for a while but were still eager to grow (or as it transpired, find visitors)...

After the event I was contacted by a local photographer who praised my business idea and invited me to a breakfast meeting where I "could meet other people who would definitely need my services."

Lo and behold - I found myself setting my alarm for before 5am the following Friday.

As I entered the room full of people, I was nervous and excited. I've never been shy but somehow the room, with all its buzz, seemed a little intimidating. It was like I was at a party where everyone knew everyone (except me). With my heart thumping, I took several deep breaths - and I went in.

It has to be said, the people were all lovely. They were all very friendly and interested in what I did.

It wasn't long before I was tucking into my reward for getting up so early and listening intently - hoping I wouldn't be called upon to speak with my mouth full - as the meeting started.

There were sections of the meeting where everyone got a chance to pitch their business, and others where a few people got the opportunity to do longer presentations. Towards the end of the meeting, everyone was invited to stand up and talk about what they had done for the group to find referrals or bring visitors. It all seemed very serious at this point, but I could completely see the benefits.

It was the final part of the meeting that made me feel like I was eating cold porridge, and hadn't just finished a hearty full English. I was a start-up in start-up mode, and I was asked by the chairperson if I would like to join and was told what the cost would be. It was a bit too hard sell for me, and I didn't appreciate the pressure. Anticipating a future of funny handshakes and medieval rituals, I didn't go back, I didn't sign up, and if I'm honest, the experience left me feeling like Networking wasn't for me.

Looking back, it's a shame I judged the book by its cover. Networking can really work in helping people grow a business, and build some much-needed relationships in the early days of starting up on your own.

I've been running my own events for years (www.outside-ideas.com/networking-in) and I've attended hundreds of other people's events. I know what works, and how to spot the people that know what they are doing.

This guide will help you get on the front foot, prepare well, and leave the event feeling like you've achieved the goals you'd set, and not like you have an overwhelming desire to run for the hills.

Your first networking event can be a nerve-wracking experience. On the outside, you want to appear calm, confident and competent, but for many of us, the fear of public speaking is real and the idea of walking into a room full of strangers (be that physically face to face, or virtually on Zoom, or one of the other platforms) can be daunting.

You're not alone. Some studies suggest that up to 75% of the population feel exactly the same.

With all that said, I hope that some of the knowledge and experience that I've gleaned over the past 15 years will help you turn up confidently and enjoy the experience.

Onwards & upwards my friend
Pete