

Business Development Series

Cultivating Your Professional Network

Success! speaks



Cultivating Your Professional Network

Cultivating Your Professional Network

Published by
Success! Speaks
Mesa, AZ 85207
www.drkarlforkner.com

Copyright © 2015 by C. Forkner

Published by *Success! Speaks*, Mesa, AZ

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning or otherwise, except as permitted under Sections 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act, without the prior written permission of the Publisher. Requests to the Publisher for permission should be addressed to Dr. Carl Forkner, 3055 N. Red Mountain, Mesa, AZ 85207.

Trademarks: LinkedIn and Facebook are trademarks of their respective companies. Images appearing herein are from screenshots of public domain profiles on LinkedIn and Facebook, respectively. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. *Success! Speaks* is not associated with any product or vendor mentioned in this book.

LIMIT OF LIABILITY/DISCLAIMER OF WARRANTY: THE PUBLISHER AND THE AUTHOR MAKE NO REPRESENTATIONS OR WARRANTIES WITH RESPECT TO THE ACCURACY OR COMPLETENESS OF THE CONTENTS OF THIS WORK AND SPECIFICALLY DISCLAIM ALL WARRANTIES, INCLUDING WITHOUT LIMITATION WARRANTIES OF FITNESS FOR A PARTICULAR PURPOSE. NO WARRANTY MAY BE CREATED OR EXTENDED BY SALES OR PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS. THE ADVICE AND STRATEGIES CONTAINED HEREIN MAY NOT BE SUITABLE FOR EVERY SITUATION. THIS WORK IS SOLD WITH THE UNDERSTANDING THAT THE PUBLISHER IS NOT ENGAGED IN RENDERING LEGAL, ACCOUNTING, OR OTHER PROFESSIONAL SERVICES. IF PROFESSIONAL ASSISTANCE IS REQUIRED, THE SERVICES OF A COMPETENT PROFESSIONAL PERSON SHOULD BE SOUGHT. NEITHER THE PUBLISHER NOR THE AUTHOR SHALL BE LIABLE FOR DAMAGES ARISING HEREFROM. THE FACT THAT AN ORGANIZATION OR WEBSITE IS REFERRED TO IN THIS WORK AS A CITATION AND/OR A POTENTIAL SOURCE OF FURTHER INFORMATION DOES NOT MEAN THAT THE AUTHOR OR THE PUBLISHER ENDORSES THE INFORMATION THE ORGANIZATION OR WEBSITE MAY PROVIDE OR RECOMMENDATIONS IT MAY MAKE. FURTHER, READERS SHOULD BE AWARE THAT INTERNET WEBSITES LISTED IN THIS WORK MAY HAVE CHANGED OR DISAPPEARED BETWEEN WHEN THIS WORK WAS WRITTEN AND WHEN IT IS READ.

Cultivating Your Professional Network

Contents

Welcome Message.....	1
Networking: What is it?.....	2
Why Should You Network?	2
Consumer-to-Business (C2B) Networking	5
Business-to-Consumer (B2C) Networking	6
Business-to-Business (B2B) Networking.....	6
Referral Networking Groups.....	7
Executive Peer-to-Peer Coaching	7
Optimizing the B2B Networking Environment	8
Electronic Networking.....	9
The Importance of LinkedIn	10
Cultivating Physical Networks from Electronic Contacts	13
Finding Networking Opportunities in the Phoenix Area	14
In Closing.....	15
Appendix A: 10 Tips to Make Your Networking Work!	16
Appendix B: The 59 Commandments of Business Networking.....	17
Networking at Events	17
Referral Groups	18
Social Networking.....	20
Appendix C: Customer Experience – the Key to C2B Success.....	22
Appendix D: Especially for Entrepreneurs	23
Appendix E: Make Yourself more Approachable at Network Events	24
References	27

Cultivating Your Professional Network

Figures

Figure 1. Most important social networks for US B2C in 2014.9
Figure 2. Most important social networks for US B2B in 2014. 10
Figure 3. Number of active users on the most popular social media sites. 10
Figure 4. Daily users on the most popular social media sites. 11
Figure 5. Social media user demographics. 11

Welcome Message

This *Premier Business Development Series* publication on *Cultivating Your Professional Network* is designed to provide information on the various types of business networking in today's marketplace. Included in this volume are definitions of the three most prevalent types of networking, tips for success in implementing these networking opportunities, and resources for finding and developing your business networks. From electronic networks to group functions & events to handshakes and partnerships, this guide will provide you with the framework to embark upon and cultivate a successful and productive business networking strategy.



Dynamic Worldwide Training Consultants (DWWTC) provides a wide variety of instructor-led information technology (IT) and professional certification training programs. All our programs are certified and designed to prepare students for vendor approved, industry recognized certification examinations.

Unlike many other schools providing certification training in today's market, DWWTC provides students with a real classroom environment either onsite or virtual involving classes taught in real time by certified instructors. Our instructors are in the classroom teaching students from the start of class day to its conclusion.

Because we understand the essential role of applied knowledge in the successful delivery of technical curricula, your training team is selected as much for their field and real-life experience as for demonstrated classroom capabilities. Our instructors have developed approaches to lead the student toward success, rather than confusion. We know how to introduce and coach topics in such a way as to practically ensure student success.

Cultivating Your Professional Network

Networking: What is it?

Networking is defined as a socioeconomic business activity through which groups of like-minded businesspeople recognize, create, or act upon business opportunities. A business network is a type of business social network whose reason for existing is business networking activity. Networking is considered to be a more cost-effective method of generating new business than either advertising or public relations efforts.

Business networking is a low-cost activity that involves more personal commitment than company money or resources.

Networking is something that is relatively simple to do and can occur in a variety of venues and formats with the professionals or consumers of choice—or necessity. You can network on the train, standing in a line, riding in an elevator...virtually anywhere! The key is simple: *Start the conversation*, because networking is about meeting people and expanding who—and what—you know.

Effective networking requires an effective plan of action. What do you want from the networking experience? Based on your desires/needs, where is the best place to look for the right people? How do you find the right people? Is there something in it for them, or just for me? How do I execute the networking plan?

As this volume progresses, you will find key points that drive networking in any situation—C2B, B2C, and B2B—including:

- Searching for and examining potential networking contacts on LinkedIn
- Having a current and relevant personal 30-second *elevator pitch* ready that will catch peoples' attention
- Having business cards (or introductory cards if you are a career-seeker) to hand to contacts—as well as ensuring you harvest their contact information (business card is preferable)
- Follow up with contacts after your initial meeting.
- Have a system for organizing and accessing contact information, whether electronic (such as the ABBYY card reader app) or manual (such as a card file).

Why Should You Network?

Once upon a time, there was an adage that said, *"It's all about what you know."* Later, as we crossed into the new millennium, the new adage was, *"It's not what you know, it's who you know."* Fast-forward to today and we find the adage has again evolved—*"It's not who you know, it's who knows you."*

People do business with people they know, like and trust. Companies don't make decisions, people do. Your professional network can open doors for you that otherwise could not be opened. For better or for worse, it's not just what you know or are capable of doing, it's who you know, that's important for career advancement and business development. You can also learn a tremendous amount from people in your network who have experience and expertise. (Fishbein, n.d.)

Cultivating Your Professional Network

Networking is *the* key ingredient to capture the essence of today's environment—who knows you. To that end, the following five reasons why networking is essential are offered (Dickson, 2015):

1. **Confidence.** By networking regularly and meeting new people you will begin to boost your confidence. Your growth—personal and professional—depends on communication skills. Play to your strengths (skills and expertise) and you will find that connecting with new professionals is a rewarding experience.
2. **Friendships.** Networking is not just for business! As you gain confidence in networking, and as you expand your network, you will find some of those connections becoming relationships beyond the purely business sense. Stay in contact, be of mutual support, and your network will be there to help you achieve your goals.
3. **Opportunities.** Networking is the most effective—and cost-effective—way to explore careers, products and services, and potential business relationships. It may not be the person with whom you connect that makes the difference—it may be the person to whom your connection may introduce or recommend you...
4. **Skill Improvement.** To effectively network, you need to develop some essential skills. Networking requires competency in listening, problem-solving, confidence, negotiations, engagement, empathy, and so on. Networking helps build those skills, as well as honing communications skills and how to express better your strengths, weaknesses, and goals.
5. **Shared Knowledge.** When networking, don't limit yourself to a single genre, industry, or field. People with whom you network will offer a variety of perspectives and wisdom based on their disparate backgrounds and experiences. Learning new perspectives will expand your knowledge—and the knowledge of those with whom you share information and perspective.

According to Fishbein (n.d.), networking is both a science and an art, requiring study of books and resources, practicing, and experimenting with different techniques to determine what works best for you—as a professional and within your industry. Based on these principles, the following 10 business networking tips can help you grow your network, regardless of industry.

1. **Be helpful.** By helping others in your network—or your colleagues—get stronger, they may be able to help you in the future and, in the spirit of reciprocity, may be motivated better to return the favor. To accomplish this, take the time to share your ideas and expertise, information important to your network or group, and take the opportunity to drive business toward people in your network—a case in which you both profit, by gaining business and by strengthening the network relationship.
2. **Build your reputation.** Value begets value. In professional business relationships, being seen as talented, helpful, and valuable make you a desired commodity. Build your reputation through accomplishments and actions, sharing and learning through media and personal interactions.
3. **Make yourself visible.** If nobody knows it happened, it didn't happen. Plain and simple, right? This is where understanding how to use properly social media, blogging, and social networking pays off.
4. **Get up, get out, get going!** Get outside your “comfort zone” and seek out new contacts and groups. Many resources exist for this, such as networking meetups, conferences and events, attending classes, seminars, and workshops, and using media like LinkedIn to associate with professional groups and get introduced to other professionals.

Cultivating Your Professional Network

5. **Have Intent.** Find where the people you want to meet hang out both online and offline and get there. Interact, build rapport, share substantive content, and lead interesting conversations. See who else spends time with the people you need to meet and connect with them.
6. **Think Long-Term.** Connections may open doors, but building relationships close deals. Networking is not just about exchanging business cards and connecting on LinkedIn—the key is using it to build long-lasting, mutually beneficial relationships. Relationship cultivating will take time—be patient, stay engaged.
7. **Get Rejected!** When you push yourself, in any area of life, you will inevitably face setbacks. In networking, you will face a lot of rejection. People will ignore your calls and email. They will decline meeting invites, and requests for introductions. Trying and failing is much better than not trying at all. At least when you try you have a chance to succeed. Learn from your rejections and grow stronger for when it happens again.
8. **Listen.** Listening is one of your greatest tools in networking and business. People appreciate when you take a genuine interest in what they have to say. You get to learn about peoples' challenges and know them better, which can enable the shift from connections to relationships. Ask insightful questions, show genuine interest, and express curiosity.
9. **Ask questions.** If you don't ask, the answer is always NO! You may be surprised at how often the questions you ask yield positive results. Ask for introductions. Ask people you want to meet to get together with you. Ask for advice.
10. **Follow Up.** A good reputation is a foundational principle for growing an effective network. Build a reputation as someone who delivers on their promises and is persistent. Two simple words to help protect and build a reputation -- Follow up! Do what you promised to do for others.

With experience, you can turn networking into an avenue to increase your net worth as a businessperson by being able to leverage the network for business intelligence (BI), products and services, partnerships, employment and hiring opportunities, and much more.

Cultivating Your Professional Network

Consumer-to-Business (C2B) Networking

C2B Networking is a business model in which consumers (individuals) create value and businesses consume that value. There are two prevalent models through which C2B networking and marketing take place. The first model is the **Reverse Auction** or **Demand Collection** model, which enables buyers to name or demand their own price—which is often binding—for a specific product or service. The second model is the **Electronic Commerce** model, through which consumers can offer products and services to companies—and the companies pay the consumers.

The primary means for C2B networking and marketing is through Internet sites, such as Web pages, Blogs, and now some social media platforms.

Over the last 20 years, technology advancements have meant dramatic changes in the application of networking and marketing. Perhaps the most important of these is the explosion in *social media* and *social networking* and how they empowered consumers to take the reins of product and service development and markets from the domain of businesses to consumers driving product and service development and markets.

Along with this technology-empowered C2B revolution came social networking. This new set of platforms meant networks were no longer the domain of boardrooms, conferences, seminars, and other meetings; rather, networking became a 24/7 proposition powered by the drive of consumers and necessarily a major venue for networking professionals. We're not just talking about LinkedIn (arguably the premier platform for business networking)—it includes Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Google+ and others. In fact, 93% of recruiters and 74% of HR professionals use LinkedIn to find "best fit" prospects for positions, while interaction within LinkedIn's focused groups provides an arena for professionals with similar interests, industries, or goals to establish and nurture relationships. Let's not forget Blogs (Web logs)! Many professionals no longer take the time to subscribe to a multitude of magazines, newspapers, or journals. Instead, industry news and commentary is provided by myriad Blogs—as well as opportunities to interact with other professionals in an asynchronous, electronic environment where numerous opinions and comments may be viewed together.

It is this new frontier—*social networking*—where consumers voice their needs, their opinions, their positive and negative feedback. This is where businesses may identify and build relationships with influencers in the consumer arena, strengthening understanding and eliciting cooperative prognostication that can lead a company to get ahead of consumer demands for products and services. With social networking the concept is relatively simple—start electronically, evolve into more meaningful relationships...with the optimum relationship being in person or, at least, directly person-to-person. Leverage relationships with consumers to predict better what to expect next in demand for products and services.

Cultivating Your Professional Network

Business-to-Consumer (B2C) Networking

B2C Networking focuses on the exchange of information from business to consumer contacts. This type of networking is most prevalent in retail marketing and sales of products and services. Although gaining its start through traditional methods—such as trade shows, giveaway promotions and specials, and events—modern B2C networking has migrated through use of the Internet and Web sites to a backbone of social media and CRM platforms.

B2C Networking has encompassed the broad spectrum of traditional methods to *start the conversation* with prospective customers to taking advantage of social media and CRM platforms that provide targeted networking and marketing with consumers.

A 2014 piece for LCT included discussion on the changing landscape of networking as technology evolves—and consumers along with it. According to Jim Moseley, co-founder of *TripTracker*, consumers are driving how businesses must adapt in order to stay relevant.

It's not so much technology has changed. It's people that have changed how they are utilizing technology to do business," said Moseley. "The tidal wave is coming. We're not in business-to-business anymore. It's becoming consumer-to-business. People will use devices to decide what kind of transportation they want and what price they want to pay. They'll want to see reviews and ratings of companies, availability, how much insurance they carry, and how often they perform on time. Consumers won't be dealing with people or travel desks; they are using a smartphone or tablet to make informed decisions electronically. (Halligan, 2014)

Business-to-Business (B2B) Networking

B2B Networking represents the arena where one business networks to achieve contacts, partnerships, and/or commercial transactions with other businesses. Three primary focus points for B2B Networking include:

- A business sourcing materials for their production process
- A business needs service of another business for operational reasons
- A business resells goods and services produced or provided by other businesses

B2B Networking is an essential function for keeping a business aligned with the industry, emerging products and services, competitor activities and trends, and opportunities for forging symbiotic associations or partnerships with other businesses.

A key obstacle to B2B networking is managing the relationship between sales reps and client-side decision makers (Gardner, 2015). No matter what the venue, it is difficult to entice a vendor from doing business with current clients—especially if the current relationship is seen as beneficial to the vendor. It is this challenge the networking—networking groups in particular—bringing together groups of business owners and decision makers in an environment that mixes formal and casual to elicit meaningful interaction between parties.

Cultivating Your Professional Network

Businesses make decisions about purchasing and relationships differently than consumers. When it comes down to the final cut between competing interests, it is often the degree of relationship between companies that tips the scale in a particular company's favor, because a relationship helps build trust. Developing relationships now—and nurturing them—is important in setting the stage for opening a new business enterprise later. Develop relationships even if the other professionals are happy with their current product or service providers...why? At some point, contracts expire or, in some cases, the relationship changes between businesses and current providers. Developing and nurturing a relationship keeps you at the forefront of your business connections' thought process when they think about changing their current providers.

Referral Networking Groups

These groups focus on encouraging mutual support between members through discussion of products and/or services offered between professionals with the intent to generate the passing of leads between attendees. In some cases, such as Business Networking International (BNI), the group may keep track of revenue gained through referrals made within the group.

Groups of this nature may be found throughout the greater Phoenix area. In addition to BNI, the various Chambers of Commerce have groups designed to foster information on the businesses of the attendees, what type of leads the members desire, and time to either congregate and discuss referrals or to set up (and later report on) meetings to discuss business or promote better understanding and lead generation.

Executives Network (www.executivesnetwork.com) focuses on fostering relationships between professionals at the Director level or above. This is a great place to find referrals for new executive-level personnel to join your company. Associated with Executives Network is EXO—a group designed for bringing together C-level executives of companies in the \$5-50mil range and Director/VP-level executives in companies over \$50mil. This is the type of group in which strategic level cooperation and partnerships are formed. While the group meets locally, it is a nationwide network that can lead to connections in major metropolitan areas from coast-to-coast.

There are literally dozens of referral group opportunities sponsored by various organizations. Many of these list their meetings on sites such as networkphoenix.com or meetups.com to cast a wide net and bring in new attendees for a variety of professions. These groups range from a broad, general attendee demographic to specialized groups based on the type of industry, gender (such as women professionals), ethnicity (Hispanic, Asian, etc. business owners), and so forth.

Executive Peer-to-Peer Coaching

This type of group provides opportunities to collaborate and share business ideas with executives of companies similar to your own, such as SMBs or large, distributed enterprise corporations. Chances are that this type of group may be how you find the right new vendor, product or service provider, client, or partner. An example for SMBs in the Phoenix area is SCORE, which provides both events and individual peer-to-peer mentoring opportunities, connected with the many area Chambers of Commerce.

Cultivating Your Professional Network

Optimizing the B2B Networking Environment

Understanding what some of the tools are in the B2B networking and marketing environment is only part of the equation for success. Gay Gaddis (2013) offered three key tips to optimizing the tools of effective B2B networking and marketing:

1. **Don't get bogged down in your own industry groups.** Although they can be helpful, I don't spend much time with people in my field because they don't buy our services; they are usually our competitors. Instead, I seek groups that bring together an array of industries and perspectives. Many times, they are our clients and prospective client events. The big message is to get out from behind your desk. You should be your own brand ambassador because no one is more passionate about your business than you are. Your travel budget may skyrocket, but so should your bottom line. I attended an event where one of our prospective clients was speaking. I sat on the front row and after his speech, I was the first person to meet him after he spoke, and which gave me a chance to hold a meaningful conversation based on the speech he just gave. Within a week we got a call from him and today his company is a major client. When preparing your statements among potential customers, be genuine and relevant to each individual.
2. **Building relationships takes time.** Follow up is imperative, but easier said than done. When you meet a person who you think will strengthen your business, you should be in touch at least once a quarter. Send something relevant and of value to them. This takes planning, discipline, and creativity. Eventually, you will be on their radar. If I asked your top five prospects, "Who wants your business," and they cannot name you or your company, then you will never get their business.
3. **Get involved in a big way.** If an organization is worth your time, you should be right in the middle of the action. Seek to serve on their boards and committees. Otherwise, drop out. When you are all-in, you will build relationships that matter. People will see how you work when you are at your best. These types of relationships build trust and friendships that almost always lead to business opportunities. (Gaddis, 2013)

Encompassing all these networking tips—especially in business networking—is a code of reciprocity. Being willing to give before receiving from others helps to set the stage for the professional relationship—it sends the message that you are not just in the network or group for yourself; rather, you are willing to be a "team player" who sees the business relationship as a mutually beneficial and enduring opportunity.

Cultivating Your Professional Network

Electronic Networking

OK. This is easy, right? The obvious answer must be LinkedIn! Oops...not so fast...there is always a “but,” right? Networking and social media is no exception to this axiom.

Ninety-seven percent of U.S. marketers say they use social media to market their businesses.

But the social networks they prioritize vary for business-to-business (B2B) marketers, compared to business-to-consumer (B2C) marketers, according to a survey from Social Media Examiner, compiled by BI Intelligence (Smith, 2014).

- ✓ **Facebook trumps other social networks for B2C marketing.** Sixty-eight percent of B2C marketers say Facebook is the most important social network. Twitter took 10% of the vote among B2C marketers.
- ✓ **LinkedIn is considered the most important social network for B2B marketing.** One-third of marketers who sell to other businesses say the professional networking site is the top social network. Facebook was a close second, taking 31% of the vote, and then Twitter with 16%.

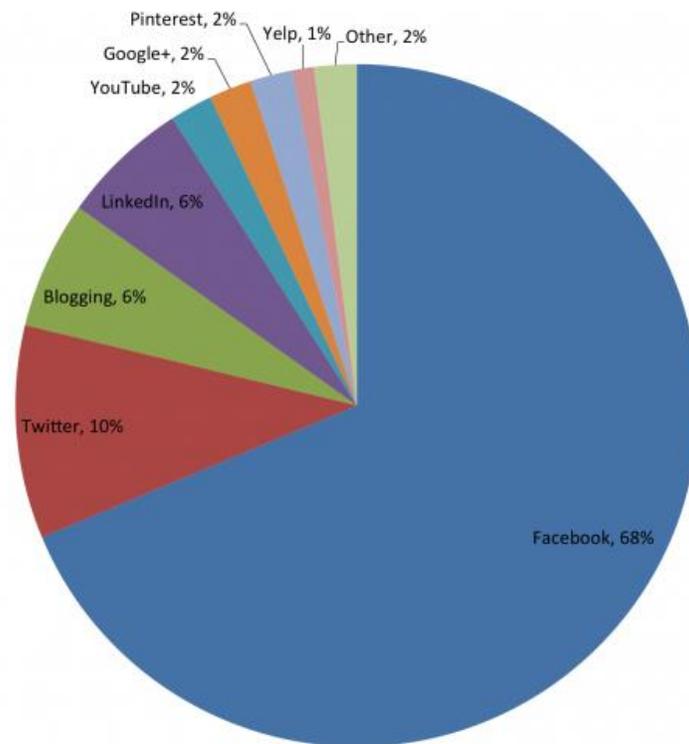


Figure 1. Most important social networks for US B2C in 2014.

Cultivating Your Professional Network

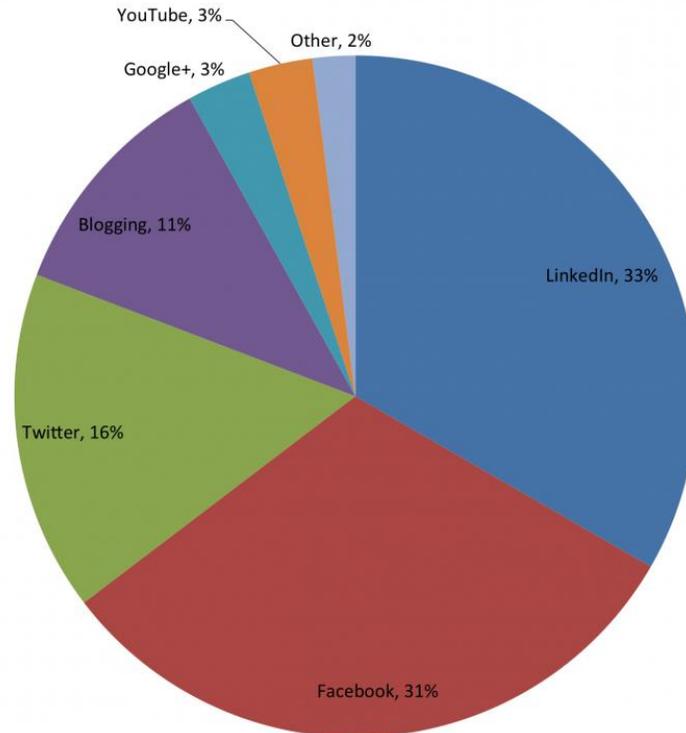


Figure 2. Most important social networks for US B2B in 2014.

The Importance of LinkedIn

The first question you might ask is “Why LinkedIn and Facebook?” Simply put, the reason is that they are both leading platforms in the world of social media! LinkedIn is the #1 *professional networking* site, while Facebook is the #1 *social networking* site as well as a growing business venue.

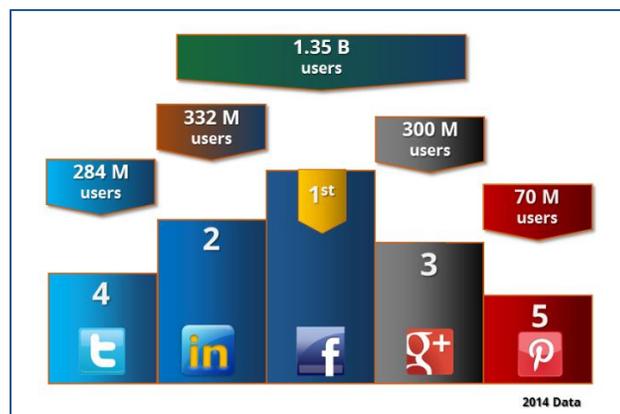


Figure 3. Number of active users on the most popular social media sites.

One of the challenges with social media platforms is that people often join a site and then drift away, no longer using the site. This can be observed in both LinkedIn and Facebook, where LinkedIn has a total membership of about 364 *Million* users and Facebook boasts over 1.6 *Billion* registered accounts! That means, however, that 32 *Million* LinkedIn users and 250 *Million* Facebook users are no longer active on the sites. Beyond the total number of users, it is also important to understand how many people are

Cultivating Your Professional Network

actually using these sites daily—not just in raw numbers, but also in the percentage of users. Again, LinkedIn and Facebook top the list.

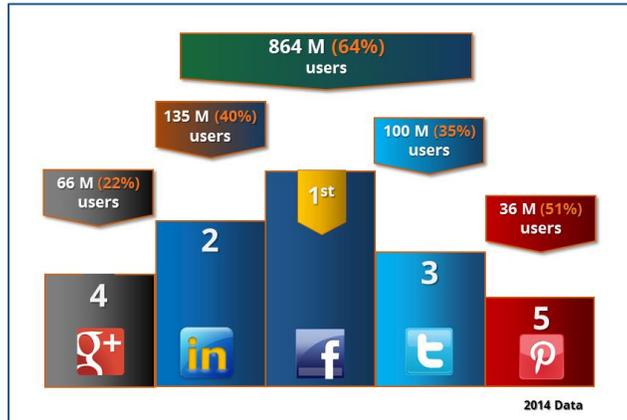


Figure 4. Daily users on the most popular social media sites.

One statistic that is worth noting in the daily user chart is that Pinterest places #2 in the percentage of users accessing the site on a daily basis. Between 2012 and mid-2014, Pinterest grew 167% in followers and the demographic of users changed dramatically. In 2012, 80% of Pinterest users were female—by mid-2014, that number had dropped to 56%, as companies began to populate Pinterest and attract men to the site. This trend has continued; however, Pinterest—as with other social media sites—still lags far behind LinkedIn and Facebook as the right place for professional and social networking.

Numbers are great, but they only represent a quantitative view of social media users, which does not really tell much about who these people really are. Let's next take a look at the demographics of social media users, examining five popular sites from the perspective of *Millennials* and *Working Professionals*, as well as identifying which social media platform boasts the broadest audience.

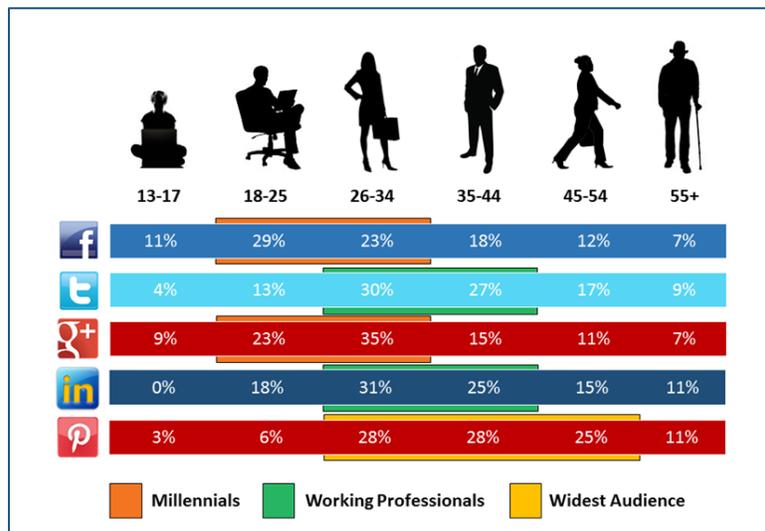


Figure 5. Social media user demographics.

Cultivating Your Professional Network

As illustrated in Figure 5, over half of Millennials are active on Facebook, while the primary demographic for LinkedIn is working professionals. Of note, however, is the trend for the 26-34 year old age group to be the most active among nearly all the social media platforms represented. Also note that the 26-34 age group is where the overlap occurs Millennials and working professionals (this is not to say there are not working professionals younger or older than the age range represented in Figure 3, only that this range represents the bulk of working professionals using social media on a regular basis).

A trend not shown by the spot demographics is that only slightly more than 30% of LinkedIn users are in the United States—nearly 70% are in the international community. An interesting statistic, considering the amount of business that transacts through American markets on a daily basis.

Also not indicated are trends in business users. Between 2012 and mid-2014, Pinterest's demographics changed from 80% female/20% male to 56% female/44% male, primarily because of an increase in companies discovering the marketing value of Pinterest. Facebook had a similar renaissance, with a rapid and sustained increase in businesses establishing a Facebook presence and using the platform to direct market to consumers. With the addition of secure direct purchasing capability other than PayPal, this trend is likely to continue.

Social media has grown over the last half decade as a focus for professional networking and finding leads for business—whether searching for partners, products and services, or new careers. As alluded to in the prior discussion, the top five social media platforms have growing followings; however; the two top platforms—especially for purposes of networking and businesses—are Facebook and LinkedIn. Although Facebook is best known for social networking, increased presence by businesses—including small and medium businesses (SMBs)—has occurred since 2012, with continued growth expected as Facebook plans continued programs to allow direct purchasing through the Facebook platform instead of third-party providers.



LinkedIn and Facebook, being the #1 professional and social networking sites in the world, are the focus of this workshop because their usefulness in developing business networks as well as assisting people searching for their next career opportunity. But before you can begin to use either of these leading platforms effectively, you must prepare yourself with the right information, the right goals, and the right mindset—in other words, a plan. When you delve into the world of LinkedIn, you will understand the importance of why it is important to identify your goals up front—LinkedIn uses various algorithms in the setup process that guide you through your profile development based on the goals you have set for your profile use. Although the Facebook professional page applies only limited guidance, it is equally important to define your goals for that page because the organization and setup of information on your page will not be as menu-driven as the LinkedIn program.

Cultivating Your Professional Network

Cultivating Physical Networks from Electronic Contacts

Because LinkedIn is the premier global platform for professional networking, it is likely that you will be able to develop a number of contacts through the site (after all, you need 50 or more to be an “All Star” level user). But developing an electronic network is not the endpoint—it is the beginning—if you are expecting to cultivate an effective, enduring relationship. To accomplish a true relationship, you need to translate your electronic connections into real-world, physical networks. No, it is not always possible, especially with global enterprise businesses, but it is absolutely key to networking among small and medium businesses (SMB). So, how do you go about cultivating that network?

First, of course, is gaining connections. There are numerous ways to accomplish this, but the key is to remain active with connections after making the link. For example, you will see people with the acronym “LION” on their profile—these people openly invite anyone to connect with them, and often have thousands of connections; however, it is literally impossible for them to develop a meaningful relationship with that many connections... LinkedIn connection counts in your profile header are capped at 500+. It does not matter how many connections you make, what matters is how many you can keep and make meaningful. The real benefit is not just from your first level connections (the ones directly connected to you); rather, the true benefit of LinkedIn connections is your second level—those people connected to the person with whom you have a direct connection. Don’t forget to examine your connections’ connections to see if there are professionals who may best suit your networking needs...and you may suit theirs (remember, networking is a two-way street).

Much like the “real world,” LinkedIn presents opportunities to gather and exchange information, opinions, and professional information. These opportunities present themselves in four useful options—sharing updates and media, sharing posts (the LinkedIn Blog feature), commenting and responding to updates and posts, and participating in LinkedIn groups. While the first three methods are available also on platforms like Facebook and Google+, what makes LinkedIn powerful for professionals is the “Groups” feature that brings together professionals with common industries, interests, and goals into an electronic venue that resembles a meeting room, but with asynchronous participation.

Sharing Information and Media. In order to keep from being “invisible” on LinkedIn, you need to be posting something at least once every week. This puts your name up on the news feeds of all your contacts regularly, so you keep yourself visible to them. Sharing is a brief (character-limited) posting to present ideas, links to articles or other meaningful material about which you discuss, or an image for which you provide a brief description or commentary.

Posts. The “Publish a Post” feature is the integrated Blog capability of LinkedIn. This allows you to share extensive discussion on a topic, including an image that helps accentuate your “Blog” post. This is a great way to elicit comments or start a discussion, whether in general (on your wall and your connections’ news feeds) or within a LinkedIn group.

Comment and Respond. Again, you must approach this LinkedIn environment with the perspective of it being a two-way street. If you see an interesting discussion or media shared by a connection, take the time to write a meaningful comment—people feel good about themselves when they notice that others are actually paying attention and reading what they take the time to share. This may have the effect of *starting a discussion* among connections relative to the shared material. Likewise, when someone comments on your material, take the time to *continue the conversation* by responding with a substantive, or at least professional, reply. When people see that you value their interaction, they are more likely to continue interacting. In both these cases—commenting and responding—starting and continuing the conversation may lead to an ongoing or more in-depth professional relationship.

Cultivating Your Professional Network

Groups. This is the key function that sets apart LinkedIn from other social media platforms. The Groups feature provides a segmented networking area for professionals with complementary industry, interests, and goals to have asynchronous collaboration among colleagues. Groups may be either public (anyone may join in) or private (the group moderator approves those who request to join). Especially germane to the private group function, this feature provides an environment to *start and continue conversations* within a focused area of interest or business. It is within groups that the realization of meaningful relationship may be cultivated with the professionals best suited to your networking goals.

Once you make local area connections, take the opportunity to nurture the relationship, learn more about each other as professionals, and then invite your connection to meet. This can be over a cup of coffee at a local coffee shop, a venue of mutual interest, or even visit each other's office to learn more about what each of you does—similar to the career-seeker who requests an informational interview with a company in which they have an interest. With technology driving so much of what we do, we often forget that human interaction is comprised of 80% nonverbal messages—something that comes out in person-to-person meetings.

[Finding Networking Opportunities in the Phoenix Area](#)

Another way to translate electronic contacts into physical relationships is through networking groups in your local area. In the Phoenix metro area, there are myriad opportunities each week to attend networking groups. The following represent a sample of the most common venues for networking in the Phoenix metro area.

Chambers of Commerce. The various Chambers of Commerce sponsor networking or leads groups throughout their purview to facilitate bringing professionals from Chamber member companies and organizations together regularly in small groups. Typically, these groups have rules, most of them allowing only one professional from each type of business to be a group member (this keeps from having direct competition within the group). The groups provide an environment where you may present your business, share leads, and even set up outside meetings to get to know another professional in the group better. The hitch? You need to be a Chamber member company or organization to participate in these groups.

Networking Events. Each day there are networking events happening throughout the Central Valley. These events range from wide open events to which professionals from any industry or organization may attend and participate, to focused groups based on industry, gender, ethnicity, location, and career level. Some opportunities are free of charge, while others may charge a nominal fee—in other words, they want you to “have skin in the game.” Some of the more prominent ones are listed below:

Networking Phoenix (www.networkingphoenix.com). Advertised as Phoenix's leading resource for free comprehensive information on business networking events & professional networking groups in the Greater Phoenix area.

Meetup (<http://professional-networking.meetup.com/cities/us/az/phoenix/>). Meetup is one of the easiest platforms to use to find networking groups parsed out by specific criteria. It contains both free and paid networking groups and events. Adaptable to many cities from the website.

Network After Work (<http://www.networkafterwork.com/city/phoenix>). This program includes regularly scheduled paid events for professionals, holding events in the evening so that they are outside most normal business working hours. Adaptable to many cities from the website.

Cultivating Your Professional Network

Phoenix Business Journal Events (<http://www.bizjournals.com/phoenix/calendar/>). This site lists, in chronological order, events around the Central Valley. Adaptable to many cities from the website.

Referral 101 Network (<http://101referralnetwork.com/>). This is a paid membership group designed to facilitate the passing of referrals for business between member professionals. It spans many locations around the Loop 101 freeway.

Executives Network (<https://www.executivesnetwork.com/>). This paid attendance group meets in Scottsdale twice monthly. It is designed to promote leads for professionals in the Director or above level of management. It is pure networking and leads—not socializing as some other events may include. The networking group is led by Molly Wendell and spans not only Phoenix but other major metro areas in the US as well.

Eventbrite (<https://www.eventbrite.com/d/az--phoenix/networking/?mode=search>). Eventbrite has listings of many networking events in the Phoenix metro area, as well as nationwide. By substituting the name of another city for the word “phoenix” in the URL, you can find events in specific locations. Events listed here include both free and paid opportunities.

In Closing...

Networking encompasses many different options, from electronic to physical relationships, from C2B, B2C, and B2B objectives and goals, from open to focused opportunities. In the end, the most important principles are the same across the board:

- ✓ Start the conversation
- ✓ Make meaningful connections
- ✓ Nurture your connections
- ✓ Continue the conversation
- ✓ Mutual support—not a one-way street
- ✓ Follow through
- ✓ Make networking a priority

Finally, the most important criterion for effective networking: Get up, get out, get going!

Appendix A: 10 Tips to Make Your Networking Work!

Network development is a critical element of business. However, far too many people go to an event, meet great new connections and... proceed to do nothing.

You can make sure you're networking the right way and making effective use of your time and money. First, learn what NOT to do at a networking event. We're having a conversation on June 18 about etiquette and making a positive and memorable impression. Learn to bring your A-game and turn your connections into clients and referral partners.



Then, use the following 10 tips after ANY networking activity to maximize your results.

- 1) **Follow up.** Within 24 hours, call or email the people you met at the event. Even if you don't see an immediate connection, simply saying hello is important in order to be remembered in the future.
- 2) **Get social.** Connect on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn or other social media sites. Look people up using their business cards and add them to your network. Can't find them? Check the Tempe Chamber social media profiles by following the links on our homepage at www.tempechamber.org.
- 3) **Take action.** Too many people walk away from networking events feeling good but doing nothing. Take one decisive action based on something you learned or someone you met.
- 4) **Connect.** Try to find one person you met at the event and introduce them to someone else you think they should know who wasn't in attendance. Where they take the relationship is up to them, but you are remembered as the one who made the introduction!
- 5) **Refer.** One of the best ways to grow a business is through collaboration with others. During the event, be on the lookout for people who have needs that can be met by someone you know. Make that connection after the event and don't be shy to ask for referrals to your business in return.
- 6) **It's a date!** Have lunch or even just a cup of coffee with somebody you met at the event. Learn all about their business but be sure to connect on a personal level as well. Take this time to get to know them outside of the networking environment.
- 7) **Take notes.** Ideas and memories fade, so write down the great ideas you had during the event. On the back of all the business cards you received write down one fact about the person to help you remember them weeks or months later.
- 8) **Tech check.** Make sure your website is easy to navigate and your social media profiles are updated and active. Those you met are likely to check you out online if they're interested in doing business with you.
- 9) **Be gracious.** Be sure to thank the host venue. A quick note will go a long way.
- 10) **Resupply.** Replenish your stock of business cards, pens, and marketing handouts after the event and you will thank yourself later.

June 16, 2015 Sean Donovan, Tempe Chamber of Commerce at:
<http://tempechamber.org/blog/index.php/2015/06/10-tips-to-make-your-networking-work/#sthash.JyqT9TYd.dpuf>

Appendix B: The 59 Commandments of Business Networking

Business networking is one of the most effective marketing and prospecting tools you can use to grow your business. Of course, done incorrectly it can actually be harmful to your business. People have to trust you before they'll do business with you or refer you. How can you make sure you are presenting yourself as someone who is trustworthy? Following the commandments of business networking below is a good start.

Networking at Events

There are various aspects of this type of business networking, from preparation to follow up and everything in between:

1. **Identify where you should go.** All venues are not right for all people. You owe it to yourself to do your research and find the venues that make sense for your business.
2. **Make a decision about which organizations.** Decide the ones you should join and the ones you don't have to join in order to gain value from the events. For example, does it make sense to join a local chamber of commerce, or just go to the events that sound interesting and will most likely include people you should meet?
3. **Register for the event and schedule it like a business meeting.** Many people either don't sign up for events or sign up for them and then forget to go.
4. **Determine how often you should be networking.** How many times should you network in a given week, month or quarter? This will help you narrow down where you should be going.
5. **Develop open-ended questions.** You can use these to ignite a conversation. Try to find unique questions. Don't ask the same old "so what do you do" question if you can help it.
6. **Attend events with a plan.** Always try to learn something new. This will keep you from talking too much about yourself and your business.
7. **Prepare yourself physically and mentally for the event.** Dress appropriately. Bring business cards. Turn your phone off or set it to vibrate. (I'm not kidding!)
8. **Don't forget to mingle.** Are you going with someone? If so, split up once you get to the event.
9. **Get the lay of the land.** When you arrive, step to the side. Take a deep breath and scan the room. This will give you a chance to regroup and focus before you approach anyone.
10. **Don't sit down right away.** Wait until the program begins. If there is no program, you can sit once you've connected with someone.
11. **Try to sit with strangers.** This is no time to stick with people you know.
12. **Be a good Samaritan.** Is there someone sitting alone? Go to them and introduce yourself. You'll be saving their life! They are alone and nervous. You can even take them with you to mix and mingle with others.

Cultivating Your Professional Network

13. **Don't give your business card to everyone you meet.** Rather, give it to anyone who asks you for it.
14. **Do get the business card of everyone you meet.**
15. **Have a firm (but not killer) handshake.** Your handshake is a key indicator of your level of confidence. So think about what your handshake is saying to those you meet.
16. **Be present — always.** When you are talking with someone, look them in the eye and really pay attention to what they are saying. You may learn something about them that tells you whether you can help them. It's also the only way you'll determine whether you should continue to get to know them after the event is over.
17. **Don't look around the room.** And don't look over someone's shoulder when you are talking with them. It's rude. You are letting them know that you aren't really interested in them.
18. **Don't take phone calls.** If you are expecting a call or have a situation that may need your attention, let the person you are talking with know there is the possibility you'll have to excuse yourself.
19. **Take necessary calls in private.** Leave the room and go to a quiet place. It doesn't make you seem important if you take a call in the room. It makes you seem impolite, silly, rude, arrogant ... take your pick!
20. **Disengage politely.** How do you get away from someone politely? There are a couple of tactics. You can tell them you don't want to monopolize their time. You can tell them you see someone you need to speak with. You can excuse yourself to go to the restroom. You can tell them you'd like to continue meeting people.
21. **Don't follow up via email.** The only exception would be if you have been expressly asked to do so.
22. **Do at least send a note.**
23. **Don't pitch too early.** Quite frankly, don't "pitch" at all. When you build relationships it will become apparent to you and the other person when it makes sense to do business with each other. Remember, business networking is about relationships – not selling.
24. **Don't sign people up for your newsletter.** Be sure you get their expressed permission before you put them on any kind of list.
25. **Don't assume.** Just because you met someone doesn't give you license to gain a referral from them, use them as a resource, or give them your promotional and sales materials.
26. **Do err.** But make it on the side of good manners and the golden rule.

Referral Groups

Referral groups work best for growing your business when you approach them with the idea of what you can provide to the group and its members. Here are some commandments to consider:

27. **Focus on giving.** Networkers don't get referrals until people trust them. And they aren't trusted until they've been giving quality referrals for a while.

Cultivating Your Professional Network

28. **Show up regularly and on time.** When you show up late and/or infrequently, you send a message to your fellow group members: you tell them that you only care about yourself because you don't take the time to learn about their needs. You show them how you deal with business meetings and associates. Why would they trust you with their clients? How can they be sure you'll treat them well?
29. **Come prepared.** Have a specific list of referral needs. The more specific you can be, the more referrals you'll receive.
30. **Always ask for what you need.** You are never so busy that you don't need more prospects in our pipeline. If you don't ask all the time, you'll run the risk of getting to a place where you never ask. If you think it may be a couple of weeks before you'll be able to get to those referrals, just let the members know that. It's okay to ask when you are forthcoming with information.
31. **Focus on the group.** Once again, be sure you are really listening to the needs of the group members. Don't play with your phone or answer emails while others are talking. Really listen and think about how you can help them.
32. **Meet with the members individually.** Do this between meetings so you can get to know them better.
33. **Do not prospect among group members.** You're not targeting your fellow group members when you have your one-on-one meetings with them. You're simply trying to build connections.
34. **Do not expect to get until you give.**
35. **Do not expect to receive right away.** It takes time to build those relationships with group members so you trust them and they trust you.
36. **Consider the other group members as resources to you and your contacts.** When you know how they do business and you trust them, you can use them as resources when people mention needs those group members can solve. This can elevate you in the eyes of your contacts, prospects, and clients.
37. **Do give quality referrals and leads.** I knew a man who would write up a referral and put "Do not use my name" on the sheet. That is not helpful. I've also seen a situation where someone gave a referral but called the referee later and said, "Don't call that person." That's not helpful! Don't give garbage. It's better to not give at all.
38. **Check with your clients, contacts and associates first.** Are they open to you giving their names and contact information to your group members? One of the worst things that can happen is for you to refer a group member to a client, only to have the client get mad.
39. **Follow up!** If someone gives you a referral, treat it like gold. You want to be sure that you follow up on it right away. Imagine how you'll make the other person feel if they refer you to someone and you don't follow up in a timely manner. It won't make them want to refer you again. It takes time to build relationships with the people in your referral group. Don't destroy that trust by failing to take a referral seriously.

Cultivating Your Professional Network

Social Networking

Just like event networking, online social networking has guidelines you should follow when participating:

40. **Decide who you want to be.** Of course, you should be you! What I mean is that before you say something in your news feed or in a discussion, make sure it maps with how you want others to know you.
41. **Don't spam.** No one likes spam and that includes pitch messages on social networks. Use the platforms as a way to continue to build relationships and expand your network. Irritating people won't help you accomplish that.
42. **Limit the self-promotion.** You can let people know what you are up to as long as that's not your only topic of conversation. When it comes to Facebook, you should only provide business-related posts on your business page. Your profile is your personal page and if you post too much about business, you may find people blocking you.
43. **Share information.** People love to learn things. Use social networking as a way to share relevant information with other people. When you share your expertise on LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter and more, you show your relevancy and position yourself as a subject matter expert. Google will reward you for it and that will help you gain exposure.
44. **Tell people why you want to connect with them.** Don't use the standard connection script if you can help it. If they aren't your closest friends, you want to give them a reason for accepting your connection request.
45. **Participate.** You'll get out of it what you put into it. That means you should be starting and participating in discussions, retweeting posts you like, commenting on posts, and sharing posts.
46. **Don't assume.** Again, being connected to someone does not give you permission to pitch. Don't do it.
47. **Explain all requests for an introduction.** Want an introduction? If you're seeking that through one of your contacts, make sure you explain why you want it.
48. **Treat your online connections as valuable.** Your online connections are just as valuable as your offline connections. So don't forget that.
49. **Take the time to get to know them.** When you engage in a conversation with someone, belong to a group with them or read something they wrote, ask them to connect directly. Then build the relationship. Remember that relationship building includes getting to know the other person, their business, and their needs.
50. **Pay attention to the chatter.** Social networking is just like in-person networking. You want to approach it as a way to learn things. When you pay attention to the chatter, the events, groups, and conversations, you'll learn an awful lot about the people in your network. You'll also learn about people you should be connected to.

Cultivating Your Professional Network

51. **Don't sell.** This goes along with spamming and self-promotion. Sounds familiar, doesn't it? Of course it does. That's because social networking has nothing to do with selling. It has everything to do with building relationships so you can grow your business.
52. **Don't feel obligated.** You can make decisions about who you connect with on different platforms. Just be consistent. If you decide that you don't want to be connected to business associates on Facebook, then don't be. If someone you don't know requests a connection to you, you are under no obligation to connect with them.
53. **Be as helpful as you can.** Whenever you can connect people or help someone with a question jump in and do it.
54. **Let them know you're real.** Don't hide behind a persona. Remember that people do business with people they trust. You have to be you in order for people to get to know you.
55. **Use your picture as a profile photo.** No one does business with an avatar. And make sure the picture is the right kind for the platform. On LinkedIn, you should be using a professional photo like a head shot. On Facebook, you should use your logo on your business page. On your personal page, you can use anything because it's personal. On Twitter a logo makes sense.
56. **Don't carry on private conversations in public.** Use common sense and good judgment and contact people privately when you want to have a one-on-one conversation.
57. **Go to events — whenever possible.** When an online group you are in has an in-person function, go to it. Meet the people with whom you've been interacting. It helps to build the relationship. Remember that you are still relationship building when you are face to face.
58. **Suggest a meeting.** When you connect with someone via social networking, follow up and suggest a meeting. The meeting can be via phone Skype or in person, depending on geography. Don't let physical distance get in your way. In this day and age, it doesn't have to be a deterrent to growing a business relationship.
59. **Be approachable.** I'm not going to get the chance to know you and like you if you are aloof. No one is so special that they are untouchable. Besides, who would want to build a relationship with someone distant?

Although increased sales are the end goal, don't participate in business networking to sell. Find and develop relationships with people you can help and who can help you.

When we detach ourselves from the emphasis we tend to put on selling, we actually improve our ability to build relationships. The sales will come naturally from there. (Helbig, 2015)

August 19, 2015, Diane Helbig, President, Seize This Day Coaching.

As published in *Small Business Trends*, <http://smallbiztrends.com/2015/08/commandments-of-business-networking.html>

Appendix C: Customer Experience – the Key to C2B Success

B2B. B2C. B2B2C. No matter what type of primary networking or marketing model you use, today, every business must be C2B—*Consumer to Business*. Consumers are the guide to your strategy for delivering value—and valuable engagement. Here are 5 tips learned from listening to key industry influencers and an IBM executive. (Hoffman, 2015)

1. Social listening is key. When a customer complains about a brand on social media, it's no longer a one-on-one conversation—their entire network will see that post. A brand that responds quickly and solves the issue gains the trust of networks of customers, satisfied that they're engaging with a business that supports them.

"The secret to good customer reaction time? Help them when they need it, now not later." —Shep Hyken, customer service and experience expert, and NYT bestselling author

2. Speed is everything. Customers judge brands by how long it takes to resolve their issues. Acknowledging the value of your customers' time verbally or with some form of compensation for the time they've lost can improve their experience and future loyalty.

"I had to spend four hours on the phone with different reps trying to resolve a billing issue." —Phil Simon, award-winning author and adviser

3. Exceed expectations. In the moment when an unhappy customer wants an immediate resolution, a powerful brand works hard make things right. Taking a positive action during a moment of adversity delights customers and sets a great brand apart from its competitors. Be ahead of the curve; knowing your customer as best as you can is your "leg up."

"You need to get everything right or don't bother entering the market..." —Bryan Kramer, Speaker, CEO of @PureMatter, author of bestseller, Human to Human

4. Treat people like people. One brand warns its customers: "You have two days to return an item, or you keep it." Another promises: "If you don't love your purchase, we'll pay for the return and even pick it up for you." Which brand deserves its customers' business?

"Develop REAL relationships: Reciprocal, Empathetic, Authentic, Long-lasting." —Kristie Wells, global social media strategy, Ancestry.com

5. Everyone's a representative. As customer expectations increase for the convenience and seamlessness of e-commerce, brands need to help more of their staff prepare to be on the front lines, interacting directly with individuals and giving them a rewarding interaction.

"I had the kind of seamless cross-channel brand experience that strengthens trust and loyalty." —John L. Stelzer, senior omnichannel strategist, IBM

Taken from Paul Hoffman, *5 Customer Experience Tips*, as published in the IBM Commerce: Marketing Blog, May 26, 2015.

Appendix D: Especially for Entrepreneurs

If you are an entrepreneur, networking is an essential skill. In fact, the ability to network effectively may be the difference between an entrepreneur simply succeeding or building and running a successful, enduring business. The most important key for entrepreneurs is to prioritize networking and carve out time is what is likely to be a hectic schedule.

Identify organizations in your area related to your industry...and get involved! After you identify the right organizations, join them and attend regularly—even set up opportunities to meet with key prospects outside of the group meetings. Once you establish relationships, determine how you can make it mutually beneficial and stay engaged.

Find people with similar client bases to the type you are looking for. Not only can finding similar professionals be a valuable resource for your own use, but they can also help your clients. For example, when you network with other professionals in your field, you have resources to whom you may refer clients when your entrepreneurial enterprise is not able to offer the specific product or service they desire. Many times your ability to refer a customer to a network partner—putting the customer first—can result in customer loyalty to you later.

Follow up! Networking is a waste of your time—and the time of other professionals—if you don't make the effort to follow up with connections. A great follow-up technique after the initial meeting is to schedule a time to meet one-on-one and then keep in touch. Without follow-up, you don't have an opportunity to realize fully the potential of the relationship. Another nice touch for following up—drop a note or card in the mail to thank connections whom you found to be beneficial!

Be generous. Hey, networking is not “all about you,” after all. As with any relationship, those cultivated through meetings and networking are two-way streets. As an entrepreneur, you need to proactive and identify ways that you can foster introductions and nurture the relationship—for you, the relationship may mean much more toward success than the potential impact on a contact who has a collection of business colleagues at his company or organization. That puts the ball, as they say, squarely in your court... (Meyer, 2014)

Adapted from Tricia Meyer, as published in B2C: Startups, September 24, 2014

Appendix E: Make Yourself more Approachable at Network Events

When you attend events, are people drawn to you or are you pushing them away? Here are ten proven ways to help yourself optimize your posture to draw people toward you from the pages of *Top Ten Ways to Maximize Your Networking Approachability* (Ginsberg, 2005).

Ready to Engage

The word *approachability* derives from the Latin verb *appropriare*, which means “to come nearer to.” Interesting. It doesn’t say anything about the approach-er or the approach-ee. Just “to come nearer to.” So the first idea to remember is that approachability is a two-way street. It’s both you stepping onto someone else’s front porch, and you inviting someone to step onto your front porch.

Although this article will address both sides of the street, here’s an example of the former. When you arrive at a meeting, event, party or anywhere in which many conversations will take place, prepare yourself. Be “ready to engage” with conversation topics, questions and stories in the back of your mind ready to go as soon as you meet someone. This will help you avoid those awkward “How’s the weather” type of discussions.

CPI

This acronym stands for the Common Point of Interest. It’s an essential element to every conversation and interaction. Your duty, as you meet new people, or even as you talk with those you already know, is to discover the CPI as soon as possible. It connects people to you. It allows them to feel more comfortable talking to you. And it increases your approachability inasmuch as people will be magnetized to you due to the commonality you share.

A great tip is to ask the right type of questions. Similar to our first example, “ready to engage,” you don’t want to ask people about the weather. You can do better than that! Instead, ask questions that begin with “What’s your favorite...” “Tell me the best...” or “When was the last time...” The CPI is almost guaranteed to be discovered.

Flavored Answers

In the event that one of those Fruitless Questions like “How’s it going?” “What’s up?” or “How are you?” comes up, don’t fall into the F.I.N.E. trap. In fact, *fine* isn’t even a word. No, seriously! I looked the word up in 23 different dictionaries and it wasn’t listed! Upon further research, I discovered that F.I.N.E. is an acronym for “Feelings I’m Not Expressing.”

A great technique is to offer a Flavored Answer to a Fruitless Question. Instead of “fine,” try “Amazing!” “Any better and I’d be twins!” or “Everything is beautiful.” Your conversation partner will instantly change his or her demeanor as they smile and, most of the time, inquire further to find out what made you say that answer. *Because nobody expects it.* And offering a true response to magnify the way you feel is a perfect way to share yourself with others, or “make yourself personally available” to others.

Don’t Cross Your Arms

Even if it’s cold, even if you’re bored, even if you’re tired and don’t want to be there – don’t cross your arms. It’s such a simple, subconscious non-verbal cue that too many people practice and it hinders their approachability.

As a result, people won’t want to “bother” you. They will form the impression that you are defensive, nervous, judgmental, close minded or skeptical. Honestly, would you want to approach someone like that? I know I wouldn’t.

Cultivating Your Professional Network

Don't Assume

Every time you assume, you end up making an ... yeah, yeah, yeah – we get it. Or do we? How many times have we uttered one of the following sentences, only to be stricken with a terrible case of Foot-In-Mouth Disease?

- You must be new here?
- How's work going?
- Do you remember me?

Remember, just because someone walks in whom you've never seen before – doesn't mean he's new. Or just because you're at a networking meeting – doesn't mean everyone in attendance has a job. And believe me, not everyone you remember – remembers you.

Approachability is a function of comfort, so it's important to sidestep these moments of embarrassment with Success Sentences. These are phrases that allow the other person to offer you the information you need to know. Examples include, "I'm not sure we've met before," "What are you working on this week?" and "I'm Scott, we met last month at the Chamber meeting."

Options for Communication

Your friends, colleagues, customers and coworkers will choose to communicate with you in different ways. Some will choose face to face, some will email, others will call, while others will do a little of everything. The bottom line is: make all of them available. On your business cards, email signatures, websites or marketing materials, let people know that can get in touch with you in whatever manner they choose. Sure, you might prefer email. But what matters most is the comfort of the other person and their ability to communicate effectively.

A good idea is to give people as many options to contact you as possible. There's nothing more annoying to a "phone person" than when she discovers she can't get a hold of you unless she emails you.

Email Signature

Whatever program you use for email - Outlook, Eudora, Yahoo, Hotmail - find out how to customize your signature. There's nothing more frustrating than receiving an email from someone who wants to talk further, get together or have you send them something *that doesn't have any personal information in the email*. So at the end of every email you send, always cross reference the following information:

- Name
- Title
- Company/Organization
- Mailing address
- At least two phone numbers
- Fax number
- Email address
- Website
- A sentence or two about yourself, your company or your job

Think of it this way: have you ever received a handwritten letter from someone that had no return address stamped on the envelope?

Cultivating Your Professional Network

Always Have Business Cards

Have you ever told a story about a successful, serendipitous business encounter that ended with the phrase, “Thank God I had one of my business cards with me that day!”? If so, great! You’re practicing approachability by being “easy to reach.”

If not, you’ve no doubt missed out on valuable relationships and opportunities. And it happens – people forget cards, get their supply reprinted or change jobs. But the bottom line is; *there is a time and place for networking: ANY time and ANY place*. Because you just never know whom you might meet.

No Fear

They won’t say hello back to me. They won’t be interested in me. I will make a fool of myself. This is the number one reason people don’t start conversations. However, practice will make this fear fade away. The more often you start conversations, the better you will become at it. So, be the first to introduce yourself or say hello. When you take an *active* instead of a *passive* role, your skills will develop and there will be less of a chance for rejection. Also, understand the gains vs. losses. For example, what’s so bad about a rejection from someone you don’t even know?

Wear Your Nametag

I’ve heard every possible complaint about wearing nametags, and all of them can be validated. Case in point:

- *Nametags look silly* – yes, they do. But remember, everyone else is wearing them too.
- *Nametags ruin my clothes* – not if you wear them on the edge of your lapel or use cloth-safe connectors like lanyards and plastic clips.
- *But I already know everybody* – no you don’t. You may *think* you do, but new people come in and out of businesses and organizations all the time.
- *But everyone already knows me* – no they don’t. Even the best networkers know there’s always someone new to meet.

Your nametag is your best friend for several reasons. First of all, a person’s name is the single context of human memory most forgotten. And people are less likely to approach you if they don’t know (or forgot) your name. Secondly, it’s free advertising for you and your company. Third, nametags encourage people to be friendly and more approachable. TRUST me on that one!

Cultivating Your Professional Network

References

- Dickson, S. (2015). Top 5 reasons why you should be networking. Retrieved from <http://www.business2community.com/strategy/top-5-reasons-why-you-should-be-networking-01308912#hpLPZwjBMMx7b2y6.97>
- Fishbein, M. (n.d.). 10 business networking tips: Grow your professional network. *Lifhack*. Retrieved October 25, 2015, from <http://www.lifhack.org/articles/work/10-business-networking-tips-grow-your-professional-network.html>
- Gaddis, G. (2013). 3 Networking tips to grow your business. *Forbes/Entrepreneurs*. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/gaygaddis/2013/07/18/3-networking-tips-to-grow-your-business/>
- Gardner, J. (2015). How B2B networking is vastly different than B2C networking. *B2B News Network*. <http://www.b2bnn.com/2015/07/how-b2b-networking-is-vastly-different-than-b2c-networking/>
- Ginsberg, S. (2005). *The power of approachability.*: Scott Ginsberg.
- Halligan, T. (2014). Adapt or fizzle--The coming tidal wave of C2B replacing B2B. Retrieved from <http://www.lctmag.com/blogpost/107258/adapt-or-fizzle-the-coming-tidal-wave-of-c2b-replacing-b2b>
- Helbig, D. (2015). The 59 Commandments of business networking. *Small Business Trends*. <http://smallbiztrends.com/2015/08/commandments-of-business-networking.html>
- Hoffman, P. (2015). 5 Customer experience tips (from real customers). Retrieved from <https://www.ibm.com/blogs/commerce/articles/2015/05/26/5-customer-experience-tips-from-real-customers/>
- Meyer, T. (2014). Networking tips for entrepreneurs. Retrieved from <http://www.business2community.com/startups/networking-tips-entrepreneurs-01016090#7quShTLegeauHLTa.97>
- Smith, C. (2014). The most important social networks to B2C and B2B marketers. Retrieved from <http://www.businessinsider.com/the-most-important-social-networks-to-b2c-and-b2b-marketers-2014-5>

About the Author

Dr. Carl Forkner is Chief Consultant as Success! Speaks and is the Chief Operating Officer & Director of Training at Dynamic Worldwide Training Consultants. He is the creator of the school's *Digital Marketing with Social Media* curriculum, as well as teaching Microsoft Applications courses and Project Management Fundamentals. He is a volunteer speaker and LinkedIn & Social Media Coach with *Career Connectors*—a Phoenix-area nonprofit organization assisting people in career transition—for which he was selected as a 2014 Volunteer of the Year. Dr. Forkner has presented seminars and workshops throughout the Phoenix area on topics such as LinkedIn, the Social Media Job Search, Social Media for Business, and Professional Networking to private clubs, companies, public organizations, and Chambers of Commerce.



Success! Speaks