



Over the years I have been to many networking events, as well as finding them endlessly useful I also enjoy them! I wish I had had a guide to help me through my first networking events, and even now as an experienced networker, I think it is easy to forget the little things that can make an event successful. So this article is a chance for you to learn from my mistakes and to hopefully become a successful networker!

Be prepared!

Make sure you have business cards and/or leaflets (and plenty of them - there may be swag bags to fill!) and if appropriate to the event, take your roller banner. Also make sure you have a 40 second pitch prepared: who are you, what do you do, and why are you there? These things will help you appear professional to the other attendees.

Plan!

What do you want to get out of this meeting? Where do the other attendees fit into the services that you provide? What services are YOU looking for? You wouldn't go into a business meeting without some idea of what's going on, networking shouldn't be any different.

Ask questions!

You need to build a relationship with the person you are networking with. People tend to buy from people that they know, like and trust - so build a rapport. Get to know each other. Be interested in their pitch, there is nothing worse than a "me, me, me" attitude at a networking event!

It's not a sales pitch....per se!

This is a classic mistake that people make at networking events. It's not all SELL, SELL, SELL straight away. You do not want to treat your fellow networkers like a commodity, again build that relationship and let the sales happen naturally.

Add value.....

If you can offer a "freebie", then do it! Is there a titbit of advice that you could give the other person? Is there a person that you could put them in touch with? Do you have a blog/article you could send them gratis? Adding this value can show people the breadth of your passion and knowledge, it can leave them wanting more which can lead to a paid sale.

....but don't under sell yourself!

I've done this a lot in the past. Know how much to "give away", but also know your worth.

Pick the "right" networking group!

Every networking group has a different feel, formality and format. Choose the one that fits you and your business, and the chances are you will then be networking with people who share a similar ethos to you. Try many but return to the ones that work for YOU.

Raise your profile!

Get involved! If you are offered the opportunity of a "speakers slot", take it! Yes, it is scary the first few times you do it but it is worth every second. You could also become part of the organising team, this will raise your profile by giving you a visible role during the meeting. It will show your passion for your business and the event.

Use social media!

Connect online with the people you have met in person. Stay in touch via whichever social media platforms you prefer. If you do not have a strong social media presence, then get one - I can not say how important this it! Continue the conversation after the networking event!

Audit yourself!

If you are networking and not getting the results you expected, then you need to look at why. Are you attending the right events? Are you making a presence? Is your pitch working? Every meeting is costing you time, money, and energy so you need to make sure it works for you, and if it isn't, work out why. If you can not pinpoint why networking isn't working for you, then do not be afraid to ask a more experienced networker for their advice.

Be yourself!

This might sound daft, but make sure you stay true to yourself. If people buy into an act, it's damn hard to keep that act up and eventually the mask will fall (which leads to questions regarding integrity). You are enough, and ultimately it is you that people are buying into. No one likes a prick!

Finally.....

Enjoy the networking meetings! It really shows if networking is a chore to you - if you don't enjoy it, audit yourself and work out why.