



Effective Event Networking

Business Development Best Practices Series

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Networking is all about cultivating relationships to develop your business. Everyone in a firm, regardless of title, is involved in securing clients, nurturing that relationship, and-most important- retaining their customer status. Through effective networking, practice, and focus, you can realize this success.

To realize the benefits of event networking, you must have goals in mind. For example, you should attend events that your clients/prospects will most likely attend as well. Select events that offer the best opportunity to meet prospective clients. As a vendor, most trade organizations would allow you access to attend conferences or gatherings. Take advantage of these opportunities.

Networking involves four steps; the goal of which is customer development and retention.

1. Sharing, giving, and helping
2. Connecting people
3. Being consistent
4. Following up and thanking

Sharing, Giving, and Helping

Sharing and giving go hand in hand. You should never expect anything in return for what you do for a customer. At an event, ask a potential customer what challenges they face. Explain how your company's products/resources can provide a solution to whatever obstacles they are facing. Always focus on their problem, and-above all-be a good listener.

Connecting People

Sharing information connects people. When asking prospects about their challenges, if you don't know the answer, you probably know someone who could help them. Successful networking involves connecting people to those that have information they are seeking. Utilize your network to help others and think of connections that could be mutually beneficial. Also, if you are going to an event and think a client, prospect, or industry partner would benefit from attending, you should invite them. You will be able to introduce them to others at the event and the same will be true of them. Connecting people helps others while building your credibility and strengthening that relationship.

Being Consistent

Consistency is the biggest challenge to networking. The goal of networking is to build and maintain relationships. Always be mindful of that goal in your everyday activities either by putting

reminders on your Outlook calendar or creating a spreadsheet of events that you will attend in the next year. Be active and, as mentioned, join the same professional organizations where a potential or current customer is a member. Multiple face-to-face interactions on a regular basis are key to building long-term client relationships.

Following Up and Thanking

Finally, follow up and thank customers and prospects after networking events. Send an email or a nice handwritten note summarizing your conversation. If you've promised something, follow through and deliver. In order to maintain that relationship, connect with them on LinkedIn. Also, if someone has referred work to you, thank them by phone or email, or by taking them to lunch or an event. Thanking someone goes a long way in defining your character.

Remember these four simple steps to networking and you'll be on your way to building relationships and bringing in work for your firm.

Below are some helpful tips to implement these steps:

- Focus on the other person and listen more than you talk
- Be genuine in your discussion and conversation
- Networking is not about selling per se—but it may result in a sale
- Everyone in a firm is responsible for bringing in business
- Say the person's name three times in your head and you're more likely to remember it
- Take business cards everywhere you go
- Follow up on any received request
- Minimize time with co-workers at trade events; always focus on the customer

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