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**Catch More Clients Using Strategic Networking**

**By Charlie Cook**

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Is networking helping you bring in the new clients you want? If you are like most independent professionals and small business owners, you put hard work into getting your name out there and distribute your business card wherever you go. You may even attend a weekly or monthly networking group or occasional business conference where people share leads. And like most people, your time and effort isn't generating a steady stream of new business.

The problem is that most people think that networking consists of telling as many people as possible what they do, and handing out as many business cards as they can. They waste the few precious moments they have with new and existing contacts by focusing on themselves.

It's possible to meet someone in the airport, hand them your card after a brief conversation, and have them call you to request your services, but this random approach is like playing the lottery. You can't count on it to produce results. It is a Push and Pray technique: you push your information out to others and pray that they respond.

It rarely works. Your contact loses your card or simply forgets about you, or the timing wasn't right, or, in spite of the connection you thought you'd made, a single conversation usually isn't enough to launch a client relationship.

That initial conversation should be about understanding your prospects' problems, needs and concerns, and collecting their contact information. The objective of networking is not to expound on your credentials.

Spend the time you have with prospects (or people who might know a prospect) asking questions and collecting information. Then you can determine whether they would have any genuine interest in/need for the solutions you provide. Use this client problem centered networking strategy to initiate and build profitable relationships.

## Catch More Clients Using Strategic Networking

### Pull Information

1. See how many cards you can collect from prospects, and don't worry about how many of your own business cards you distribute. Some successful marketers don't even have a business card.
2. When you meet people, use the time to gather information from them, including: Primary concerns about their business Problems they want solved Unmet business needs. Areas where the solutions you provide overlap with their needs Their contact information
3. Continue to expand your network. Whenever you make a contact, ask for referrals to other prospects.
4. Once you have this information, enter it into your database or contact manager.

### Build Relationships

1. People have short memories. Follow-up after your initial contact and then stay in touch with your network on a regular basis. If you let more than a month go by without making contact they'll forget that you exist and that you are the best person to solve their financial, legal, human resource, design, or other problems.

You'll want to make personal contact with some people on your prospect list, but in most cases, a letter, newsletter or ezine will do the job. Use the merge function in your software to personalize your mailings.

2. Demonstrate the value of your expertise or products by sending prospects and clients an idea or suggestion they can use right away. You could present this in an article you've written, or one you've read. Your contact will then associate you with the problems you solve.

Pull information from prospects and clients to grow your network, stay in touch and regularly demonstrate the value of your products and services.

Networking should be one of the core marketing tactics of most independent professionals and small business owners. Use client-centered networking to lessen your reliance on costly and time consuming cold calling/telemarketing and advertising. Over time, this business building strategy will reward you with a steady stream of new clients.

The author, Marketing Coach, Charlie Cook, helps independent professionals and small business owners who are struggling to attract more clients. He can be contacted at

or

visit [www.charliecook.net](http://www.charliecook.net) to get a copy of the free marketing guide, '7 Steps to Get More Clients and Grow Your Business'

## Three Planning Myths

By Denise O'Berry

Are you — like 70% of business owners — working without a plan? Here are three myths that need to be dispelled about strategic planning for small business.

1. It has to be formal — Not so. The value of a strategic plan for your small business is in putting the ideas on paper, creating action steps that will get you where you want to go and implementing those action steps.
2. I'm too small — Not so. Even a one-person business can benefit from a strategic plan. A strategic plan can help you make decisions about time management and budget. Use your strategic plan to help you determine whether to attend an event or advertise in a publication. It's a check and balance tool.
3. A strategic plan is like a ball and chain — Not so. It's your plan. Too many business owners feel like once it's on paper, it can't be changed. Wrong! It should be an active document that gets reviewed and updated at least monthly, if not weekly. You're the business owner, you wrote it, you know what's happening in your market — adjust as necessary.

Denise O'Berry helps small business owners take action to grow their business. Find out more at

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