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Improving Your Social And Business Networking

By Dave Lloyd

Social networking is not a new phenomenon – people have been meeting together for centuries as a way of expanding their friendships, increasing their sense of community, and establishing new business relationships. And even in the last half century neighborhood or city-based networking organizations have arisen such as the Lions, Kiwanis, and Elks clubs along with those dedicated to pure networking like Business Networking International and LeTip. But it wasn't until a website called sixdegrees was created a few years ago that online networking started to take off – sure chat rooms and listservs had existed in the pre-1995 days but there were never resources online dedicated exclusively to networking. And while sixdegrees sold off their company's assets to other online upstarts, the networking craze had begun. Depending on where you look, there are potentially hundreds of websites where one can network, separated out by interest, industry, and geography and whether the networking interest is for business or personal reasons.

For more business networking, there are 4 primary sites individuals use to expand their network and ultimately their income. The granddaddy of them all is craigslist – a San Francisco-based warehouse of local community news, classifieds, dating options, and job listings started by Craig Newmark that has content specific to the top metropolitan regions in the US. It's a popular site and useful for many things – as ebay found out when they recently purchased a 25% share. ecademy is a UK-based site created by the uber-networker Thomas Power. ecademy requires membership and is set up for pure networking, particularly on a worldwide basis. The site also enables blogging, industry-specific content and chats, and is enabled for heavy-duty networking with known and unknown associates. Ryze is a site focused on business to consumer networking and provides a venue to create a community around your business and personal interests – unfortunately, Ryze use is not regulated too well so the connections and content often related to business opportunities, MLM deals, and value-less connections. LinkedIn is the current disputed leader in the US and worldwide due to its ease of use, practical benefit, and value added features including providing a testimonial for someone you know, passing along requests for connections, job listings, and easy networking with those with similar interests.

Regardless of which site you decide to use, pick one initially and commit to a week or month of consistent participation in the community and decide how you might benefit the work or personal lives

of others. As with everything else in life, you get out of it what you put into it – so think both of how you can benefit yourself and others as you participate.

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Networking is Like Playing the Piano

By Janice Byer, CCVA, MVA

For anyone who has ever read articles I have written or asked me for helpful tips for getting their business up and going, you know that I truly believe that networking is one of the most important aspects to building a successful business. The spoken word has an awesome power for any entrepreneur.

Networking, in relation to running your business, is not just attending events that allow you to meet new contacts and exchange business cards. Networking is any time you talk about your business. Whether you are at a social event and you get the chance to bring up the wonders of being a small business owner or you bump into an old college friend and you swap stories about what has happened in your lives since you last saw each other, anytime you get to tell someone about your business, that is networking and you should jump at the chance.

Even when you chat on the email discussion lists that you belong to and use your signature line, that is networking. There are so many opportunities to network every day.

But (and I am sure some of you can relate to this) the hardest part of networking can be "what do I say?" How do you let them know the great aspects of your business without over doing it or sounding full of yourself?

Well, there are many contributing factors when it comes to saying just the right thing at just the right time, factors that will influence how well you impress others and whether you leave a positive lasting effect. First and foremost, what are the circumstances of your encounter? Are you at an organized networking event or are you chatting with a friend? More often than not, your attitude and professionalism will be determined by your surroundings.

You will also have to play it by ear at times. You need to get a feel of how much your listener wants to hear. If someone comes right out and asks, "What do you do?", don't refrain. This is a perfect opportunity to describe your business. But, there are two things to remember... one, don't over talk;

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and two, give your audience a chance to talk about themselves as well.

However, if you are in a situation where it is not an organized networking event but you get the feeling that mentioning your business would fit into the conversation, then be as reserved as the situation warrants. A social conversation is no the place to ramble on. A quick mention would suffice and, if you notice an interest from the person you are talking to, by all means continue on. But remember to call it quits when you get a feeling it is time to do so.

Regardless of the situation, if you have an opportunity to talk about your business, be sure that one of the first things you mention is the benefits your product of service offers. Sure, your name and the name of your business is important but it is the benefits of your products or service that are going to influence your listener and make the sale.

Also, networking is like playing the piano... you get better with time and practice. Everyone feels nervous (to a certain degree) when they visit networking events, whether they are in the start up phase or even after years of running their business. But, the more times you attend them, the easier it will get. You will be able to calculate what you say that has the highest impact on your listener and mould that into the perfect infomercial for your product or service.

Networking is a vital and powerful way to promote your business. So, keep your eyes open for opportunities and fine-tune what you will say and soon you will become a master at convincing others of the benefits of what you have to offer.

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