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Leads: It's Not (Just) in the Cards

By Adrian Miller

One of the most enjoyable professional experiences is the "aha" moment that erupts when you're able to provide a business contact with a lead. It's a tremendously enjoyable, productive, and effective way to network.

That is, it's all of these things when it actually occurs.

The thing is, these peak "aha" moments are quite infrequent; and, apparently, much less common than most people think. In truth, because these experiences can be so memorable (for all of the reasons noted above), that it's easy to think that they happen every other week. But upon closer look, it's probably more like once every few months; maybe a handful of times a year, if you're lucky.

Paradoxically, while the "aha" lead link experience is in itself a very efficient thing - because you're tangibly and measurably helping solve a business problem through your referral - the approach to generating leads is woefully inefficient. This is explained below.

From Bartering to Stores of Value: A Trip Down Economic Lane

To understand the dynamics of the "aha I know someone who can do that" experience in all of its well intentioned but inefficient glory, let's take a quick glance at one of the greatest inventions in the history of our species: money.

Not all that long ago, if you wanted something - say, a pair of shoes - you had to have something to trade for them. And furthermore, the person selling you the shoes had to need what you had to trade. In other words, if you and your shoe salesman didn't have mutually aligned "aha" moments, then there was no immediate deal - he was stuck with a pair of shoes that he could have sold, and you were stuck wanting a pair of shoes, and not having them. It was very depressing. Many people went shoeless.

What had to take place, was that you had to trade your stuff to someone else in order to obtain something that the shoe salesperson wanted. Then, and only then, could you make the deal. It could take months; or just shelved entirely.

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And then, cheerfully, money started circulating. And this money was nothing but a store of value. It was a piece of paper (or a piece of metal) that held a certain value, and could be traded with ridiculous ease between multiple buyers and sellers. Need some shoes? No problem! Send in some of that money (and add a little bit extra, the service was great) and get a pair. It brought people together, and enabled them to do business because they had money. They had something in their pocket that enabled an "aha" moment to occur.

From Money to Lead Generation: Being Proactive

In a nutshell, the introduction of money allowed people to be very proactive. They didn't have to wait for infrequent aha moments in order to do business. Thanks to the money in their pocket, they could

be prepared for an unforeseeable future. They could, in essence, experience aha moments all of the time. Several times a day, in fact.

Generating leads through your business network can take the same path, and benefit in much the same way, as the economic system did in its evolution from bartering goods to exchanging money.

How? Simple: when you network, don't limit yourself to looking for aha moments. There's no need! Rather, learn about what your business contacts do; even if you don't immediately need them, and they don't immediately need you.

When you develop relationships with quality partners and learn about what they do, how they do it, why they do it, and with whom they do it, you are in essence acquiring a store of value. You are increasing your capacity to be proactive, and to generate exponentially more aha moments in the future if and when an opportunity to work together (or make a referral) happens.

The thing to remember here - and it's important, because it's a new way of thinking - is that you don't need to need anything from a potential networking partner in order to proactively find out all you can about them. Nor do you need to be trying to find a fit for someone who asked you if you "knew someone" who did this or that. As you develop relationships and generate leads, you are adding to your "bank account" of quality partners; both for yourself, for your partners, and for your clients. And at the same time, you're investing into someone else's account; they, too, now know what you do, how you do it, why you do it, and with whom you do it. And when they need you, for themselves or for a contact, they'll be in touch.

A New Way of Thinking

The freshest way of looking at this is as an opening up of a closed box. For centuries, generating leads has been a reactive exercise. You (or your business ancestors) went to a so-called networking event, and tried to find a "fit" for your current need. At the same time, you were sought out by other businesses as possibly filling of their current needs. If there was no immediate aha moment - if you didn't need shoes and someone there didn't sell the shoes you wanted - then little was accomplished.

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And even if you did walk away from a networking event with a pocket–full of business cards, that wasn't as helpful - or valuable - as it should have been. There was no proactive attempt to learn about quality partners who didn't fit one of your current needs, or vice versa. In other words, you (naturally) focused on the partners that could help you here and now; and so did the other people in the room.

But that's the closed box; and it's extinct (but doesn't quite know it yet). The new way of looking at this - the open box - is to proactively generating leads regardless of whether there is a current need.

This increases your bank account of potential partners down the road, and at the same time, increases your exposure to quality professions in various walks of workforce life. Indeed, even if a business deal is never struck with a proactively generated lead, the cross–dialogue with quality, excellence–driven professionals can be incredibly rewarding and totally profitable. After all, as we all know, innovations in how business is done is not limited to any particular field or type of professional; knowing how an automotive manufacturer is successfully anticipating customer demand can help you sell your hotel rooms. Learning how a marketing firm is branding itself can help you increase market share for your law firm.

It's Not Just About the Cards

"Aha" moments will still pop up from time to time, and they'll still be very enjoyable experiences. But remember: networking these days, and in the future, isn't merely about trading cards and seeking that rare "oh yes, I know someone who can do that" moment. It's about proactively building your business bank account with stores of value; with information that you have learned from actively generating leads.

In this way, your access to new business professionals will increase as your circle widens and opens outside of its conventional framework. The results? More "aha" experiences. A high quality network of diverse professionals who can provide answers and insight. And, of course, our old favorite: more money!

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My Collection Of Sports Cards

By Triston Huntsmin

I have never been too keen on collecting things. I am sort of a simple guy at heart, so I love having only what I need. I have one running collection, however, that only seems to get bigger as the years go on. Sports cards. I really love gathering, trading and owning sports cards.

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My love for sports cards began as a young child. My dad would reward me with sports cards when I did well at my chores or when I studied well for school. It was one of the only rewards he offered, and it quickly became the only reward that I was interested in. I remember the joy of buying my first binder to hold my sports cards in. I had saved my allowance for a couple of months and could finally buy the special sports cards holder that I had been looking at in the sports cards store.

As I got older, I phased in and out of looking for new sports cards, but I continually cherished my sports cards collections and I spent many hours of free time looking at them and memorizing everything I could about them. Some of my brothers and my friends made fun of me for loving my collection of sports cards so much, but I didn't care. I collected cards from baseball and basketball players mostly, but I've got small collections of cards from a variety of players.

When I had my own children, I could hardly wait to begin sharing my love for sports cards with my sons. I bought them sports cards within a week of their births and I continued to start small collections of cards with them. As they have gotten older, they have truly started to love sports cards like I do. Some of our best times together and our best conversations are surrounding our collections. No one else seems to understand their value quite like we do.

Once a year I take my three sons to a huge exhibition that is focused solely on sports cards. We bring our big binders and we make purchases and trades all weekend long. It is our favorite weekend of the year. We have a great time together and I love that I have something in common with my sons. They love asking my advice about particular trades and purchases, and I love giving my advice to them about sports cards.

It is never too late to start a collection of sports cards. It is a fun hobby that will keep you entertained for years to come.

Triston Huntsmin is a father and a car dealer that loves to collect sports cards in his free time. See

<http://www.sportscardshub.info>

for more details.



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