



BUSINESS NETWORKING BEST PRACTICES

FROM MBD MARKETING & EVENTS

1. Choose the right venue.

In the same way that it may not be the best idea to pick up a date at a funeral, make sure that you are in the right space to discuss your business. A strong networker can find an opportunity in any event or activity, but if you are new to making business connections, seek out events specifically for business networking. Most local Chambers of Commerce have regular opportunities that can help you connect. Additionally, seek out professional groups or associations related to your field for similar events.

2. Define your message.

Once you've identified your intended networking venue, consider your goal. Are you looking to share information on a specific service? Seeking feedback on a new project idea? Have a specific message and practice it! Developing a refined elevator pitch is key to networking. It doesn't matter who you meet if you're not able to articulate your message.

3. Move past your anxiety.

Putting yourself out there can be tough, and networking can be especially taxing after a hard day. Make sure you're in the right head space to meet new people and don't let nerves or failure get the best of you. Prepare for any tough questions that you might encounter and dress with confidence. Be bold. You can do this!

4. Read the room.

As you navigate the networking space, be cognizant of the vibe around you. Two people whispering in a corner may not be looking for a third wheel. Be careful not to interrupt others when they're speaking and practice good listening. You want to stand out, but not for being rude. Paying attention to others - and maybe having an ice breaker ready to go - will help you fit right in.

5. Stay positive.

When considering how to join or begin a conversation, avoid speaking poorly about others or gossiping. Staying positive and professional in a networking situation demonstrates that you'll be positive and professional in a business engagement.

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6. Ask questions.

Networking is about give and take. Don't monopolize the conversation talking about yourself or your product only - ask about others. Everyone wants to get their message out, just like you. Give others the chance to share and support their goals when you can. If you help someone, they will probably be more likely to help you as well.

7. Be prepared to act.

In the same way that you need to have a refined message, you also need to have a clear follow up. Be direct about what you want - "could I take you to coffee to pick your brain about this project?" or "I would love to connect with you on LinkedIn." Have your business card at the ready! Consider keeping additional materials in your car or offer to follow up with more information.

8. Follow up.

If you hit it off with someone at a networking event, don't waste the opportunity. Follow up with a note, email or LinkedIn connection so you can continue to engage in the future. Careful listening (and even notetaking in some instances) can help you remember what you discussed and potential things to follow up on. By building deeper, meaningful relationships, you can further your business goals more effectively.

9. Make plans to do it again.

Networking is most successful when you do it well and often. This takes practice and investment. If you enjoyed an event put on by a specific organization, check out their upcoming events. If you met someone in a complimentary industry, ask if they have any favorite networking spots. And remember - any opportunity can be a connection. You just have to go for it!

10. Pay it forward.

Once you've become a master networker, invite a newcomer into the conversation. In the same way that others showed you interest and kindness, do the same. A rising tide lifts all boats.

