

Business Cards Are Not Your Customers

Planning on attending a networking event? Learn how to make it count.

Business networking events. Some people look forward to them, others may secretly groan when they show up on the schedule. The long and the short of it is: if you're going to attend, make them count. The key is to have a plan before you even leave the office.

- **Set a goal** of how many new contacts and how many previous acquaintances you will make contact with. This keeps you on track to maximize the opportunity.
- **Determine how and when you will follow up** with people after the event.
- **Bring extra** business cards. (Of course.)
- **Gathering cards is more important than handing out cards.** Someone doesn't have cards? Jot their info on one of yours.
- Keep a permanent marker with you and **jot down what you talked about and your next step** (pens don't write well on business cards).
- **Tell people that you will follow up** (and then do). Then they will be more receptive to hearing from you. Plus, you'll be more apt to do it because you said you would.
- As soon as you leave the event, **take a moment to sort through the business cards you collected**; rank and categorize them by how they fit into your network and how you can help one another.
- Don't just leave the cards you gathered on your desk. **Enter them into your database** and schedule contact dates in your calendar.
- **Add each new contact** to your LinkedIn network.
- **Follow up** with a quick email or phone call within 24-48 hours. Schedule this on your calendar. Seriously, set aside the time and make yourself do it. Remember, you told them you would.
- **Share a resource with them**—something helpful (e.g. a blog, article, book suggestion, or person they should connect with)—not a sales piece. Give first and expect nothing in return.
- **Make it personal**, "It was great meeting you yesterday. Enjoy your family reunion this weekend."
- Following up once may not work. **Touch base on a regular basis.** You're simply staying connected. Next time you see them, they'll (hopefully) remember you.
- **Subscribe to newsle.com** and send a congratulations every time one of your contacts pops up.
- **Invite your new contact to another networking event** you will attending. This is a great way to interact with more of your contacts face-to-face.

Continue to give and don't expect reciprocity – it will come on its own. When you're connecting with someone, you're communicating with their network. **The idea is to keep your name and what you do at the top of their minds.** Your product or service doesn't have to apply to them, use the strength of that one connection to open many doors.

Networking is part of business growth, and **two important aspects go hand-in-hand:**

1) You're creating awareness of your brand and your existence. 2) You must capitalize on that awareness through follow up. **To put it bluntly, without follow-up, you've wasted the opportunity.**

