

TOP TEN TIPS FOR MORE EFFECTIVE BUSINESS NETWORKING™

1. Business Cards

Your business card is the first thing you exchange with another person at any networking event. Therefore spend a lot of time designing your business card and have the printing done by a professional. Spend some money and don't be a cheap skate on the costs. Ensure that your business card has all the appropriate details about you, your website, telephone numbers and whether or not you use Skype or another VOIP no cost telecommunications network. Decide whether or not you want your picture somewhere on the face of the business card.

The business card should contain your logo and any slogan which may accompany your logo and which forms part of your brand. The back of the business card is usually left blank and this is valuable advertising space for the services or products that are your core business and can essentially give details of material to be found on your website. Utilise this space to the fullest. Do everything you possibly can to direct the person you have just been introduced to, to go to the website to obtain further information about your business. No good doing a 30 minute elevator speech if all the information can be obtained and given from your website.

The essential element to business cards is to take them everywhere you go. Keep some in your car, briefcase, jacket pockets, purse and luggage.

2. Start a Conversation

Instead of asking the person about their business, ask some open ended questions such as "What is the greatest challenge you are finding today in running your business?" or, "What is your unique selling proposition (USP)?" This gives them the opportunity to similarly respond with an open ended answer which can range across a number of topics. That answer may contain facts about their business that you can assist them with or know somebody in your network that could assist them. Do not necessarily talk just about business, remember this is a relationship that you want to establish and continue with, so find out their interests in terms of sport, hobbies, their family and what else they enjoy doing in life. You will see whether or not you are compatible in terms of some of your interests or whether or not they have some that are completely different from those that you have. In which case, ask further questions about their interests so that you can understand what they enjoy and what motivates them. Visit our [Articles page](#) and check out the article on Dealing with Difficult Conversations.

3. Follow-up

Immediately following the network event or the social meeting, as you now have their business card or business reference send them an email saying how pleasant it was to chat with them at the meeting and mention some area of common interest that you might want to pursue together. If you have more to talk to about with them and find them interesting, suggest a coffee meeting so that you can discuss these mutual interests. Do not under any circumstances in the first meeting or in this contact try to sell them your product or service.

As a follow-on from the meeting also enter their full details from their business card into your current customer relationship management database such as Microsoft Business Contact Manager or other CRM applications. Make notes in the general section of their entry as to the first meeting, the time, where it was and what your initial discussions encompassed.

4. Other Networking Meetings

Invite the person you have just met to another networking group to which you belong. If that networking meeting has a speaker dealing with a particular subject and you think that subject may be of interest to the other person, then issue an invitation to come with you. Good event

organisers make a special point of providing professional speakers on business topics for each event, so evaluate and compare the value to your business of different networks. Networking is not just about meeting new people but also educating oneself in areas where you have limited expertise and wish to acquire more knowledge and expertise.

5. Begin a Group Network

With all the people that you have met and with whom you have started to form a relationship with, think about forming a group network which offers a range of services from each business member or business owner of the group and which you can offer as a group service. While your own business may be a singular product or a singular service combine it with others into a group offer and that will attract a lot more business. Talk or meet as a group regularly for brainstorming sessions.

6. Planning and Process

It is a good idea to work out a networking plan so that you understand your end goal. If it is to introduce yourself and collect five business cards each networking event then ensure that is part of your plan and try to meet your target at each networking event.

In terms of the process, develop your own networking process so that you know from step one to step ten what it is that you are doing at each step of the way and what is the final goal. Is your business to be a referral site, is it to be part of a group or is it to have as many business contacts in your business network as possible?

7. Link Your Website

If you are the owner of a website, networking is important, so that when you have developed relationships, ask the other business owner to link to your website in some way. Incoming links to your website are very important for search engine optimisation and also if you are using a web grader it will increase your scorecard. (A web site grader will rate your own website in a score out of 100 and can also compare your web site to a competitors web site score.) Remember that networking is designed to build your business and if you can think of any way in which new contacts can enhance your business then ask them to do so and reciprocate. Especially be a giver, no one tolerates a taker for long, so give away some freebies. Visit the PBDA [Business Links](#) page.

8. Mini Expo

Treat each networking event as a mini expo for your business. If the event organiser has arranged a resource table for display, ensure that you have your brochures, pamphlets, business cards and any information about your business prominently displayed on that resource table. If your event organiser does not have a resource table, then suggest it in the future and suggest it also to the people that you meet that it would be a good idea if they also advertise their product or services in that manner. Remember all this type of advertising costs you nothing, but some time and the price of a meal. Visit our [Top Ten Tips page](#) to see our tips on business expos.

9. Speed Networking

There are quite a number of businesses including the American Chamber of Commerce that have organised speed networking events. Remember that this sort of event is counter intuitive to the whole essence of business networking in that it is not trying to establish any meaningful relationship; it is just a matter of meeting people, thrusting a business card in their hand and moving on. To our knowledge there are no successful speed networking events.

10. Start a Business Alliance

This could work well if your business is in close proximity to another business. A greengrocer could work with a delicatessen owner to provide a hamper of food and fruit for a picnic. A web site logo designer could partner with a web designer, as usually a new venture will start with a logo, then a business card, and then a web site.

Look at your business and the next service provider one step back, and one step after you. If you do form an alliance, ensure you produce a bundled customer product or service which is provides more value for a lesser price, than if the customer bought each product or service singly.

This Top Ten Tips for Business™ was prepared by Phillip Allan, Managing Director, Professional Business Development Australia (PBDA). If you would like more information contact Phillip Allan now by calling **(02) 9653-3526** or for help with any aspect of your small, medium or home based business go to our website www.pbda.com.au Phillip has extensive business experience in law, commerce, outsourcing, property development and can assist with your business planning, business plans and coaching. Also read our other [Top Ten Tips for Business](#) - all FREE.