



Business Success & Happiness



A Guide to Networking

By Inge Dowden





How to get the most out of your networking activities

Networking is a great way to get new business. If you're just starting out you need contacts and if you've been in business a while you need new contacts. There are lots of business networking events out there, and it's not always easy to make them actually work, so if you're not careful you can end up spending a lot of time and money without getting any results.

This guide will help you get the most out of your networking activities. It applies to all the different formats out there and includes some tips for online networking as well.

1. Have business cards

This may sound obvious, but there are still people who go to networking events without business cards, or whose cards are of low quality, and this will affect how people see you.

What you want is a good quality business card (preferably 400gr laminated) that is printed on both sides. On one side you can put all your contact information (top tip: make sure you include your social media links) and on the other side you can put any special offers you may have or tell people more about what you do.

Don't print too many (maximum 500 but initially just 100 or so) and make sure that you throw out any ones that aren't relevant anymore or have the wrong information. No handwritten phone numbers or email addresses – they definitely send out the wrong message. It's relatively cheap to get good quality business cards, and they are your first impression, so don't skimp on this.



Two great local suppliers who can produce good quality cards quickly and for a reasonable price are www.jamjarprint.co.uk (£24 for 250) or www.brunelone.com (£22.00 for 100).

2. Go to the right events

Know your target audience and go to events where you will find them, or the people who also work with them. For example, if your target audience is students, make sure you go to events where students go, or where other suppliers to students go. That way you have much more chance to find the relevant people than if you went to every networking opportunity out there.

In the beginning it is a good idea to go to lots of different events to see which ones are most suitable for you, but after about 6 months you should make a choice and go to the events that work best for you and then really work them.

3. Research and prepare

Find out what the format of each particular event is. Some events are only open networking, others have an agenda. Sometimes you get 40 seconds (4N) or 60 seconds (BNI), other times you get 2 to 3 minutes (FSB & Business Network South West) to present yourself and your business. Make sure you are prepared for the format of the event. Always write down your presentations and practice them before.

Find out if you're allowed to bring banners and/or flyers. Bring them if you can and display them clearly. If you can bring a banner find the best place to put it (which is why you should always arrive early) so that most people can see it. This is especially relevant at sit-down events.



4. Prepare your elevator pitch

Make sure that when someone asks “What do you do” (which they will), you have a cohesive and short answer ready. It’s a good idea to prepare 3 different ones: one of about one sentence, one of about 5 sentences and one that lasts about a minute. That way you have something ready for different situations.

Make sure that you can answer the following questions:

- What do you do?
- How do you do that?
- What is the benefit to clients?
- Who is your ideal client?

As a general rule it’s a good idea to have the short, one sentence answer be the one that elicits another question.

For example:

‘What do you do?’

‘I make people look their very best on their wedding day.’

‘Oh, how do you do that?’

‘I provide hair and make-up services in people’s homes as well as in my salon.’

That way you pique someone’s interest more than if you had just said ‘I’m a hairdresser.’ People will assume they know what you do, whereas you obviously do something special.

5. Approach with confidence

A lot of people don’t like networking because they don’t like talking to strangers. However, remember that at a networking event, everyone is there for the same reason as you: to meet new people. So if you’re the one approaching someone with a friendly smile and a ‘Hi,



I'm Alison, and I'd love to know what you do.' they'll be only too pleased that you took the first step.

If you find this particularly difficult think of a time or a situation when you felt confident (usually when you're in familiar surroundings or doing something you know you're very good at). Remember that time and how you felt. Go back to it and relive it. Just before you enter the room you take a deep breath, put your chin up and remember that feeling of confidence.

6. Ask questions & be memorable

Be the one to ask the questions. Ask them what they do and especially ask them the killer question that will help you raise your profile immensely: 'How can I help you get more business?' or 'What are you looking for?'

Also don't forget that people like people who are like them. So if you can find out anything personal (for example what football club they support or where they like to go on holiday) and you can build a genuine bond based on that, you'll have much more success.

And if you have any interesting hobbies or interest, feel free to share them. People are much more likely to remember the "IT guy who collects beer mats" than the "IT guy who offers IT solutions to small businesses".

7. Don't sell

Do you like to be sold to? Probably not. So don't do it to other people. Explain what you do, by all means, but don't try to sell something during your very first meeting. Remember that at this stage you're just introducing yourself and getting to know them. If they express an interest in what you do then of course you follow this up and arrange a meeting or send them whatever they need. Your initial approach, however, should be one of an explorer:



you're finding out who's in the room and who could potentially be of interest to you. You do this by asking lots of questions and offering to help.

Once you've met people a couple of times, you can talk about a special project you're working on or a new product you're introducing. Although in general this is better left outside the networking event.

8. Be specific

When people ask you what you're looking for (because they are also following rule no. 6) make sure that you can give them a very specific answer. The more specific, the better. Remember: nobody knows 'anyone'.

If you're a florist, and you're looking for corporate contracts, give them an example of the type of business you're looking for (i.e. solicitors or investment companies who receive clients at their offices).

If you're a web developer, and you're looking for start-up companies, you could say that you're looking for people who are complaining about their job and might want to set up their own business.

Do some research and if you're looking for an introduction into a specific company, tell people about it.

9. Follow up – don't spam

After the event, send an email to the people you've spoken to personally and make sure that you personalise the email. Give them some information they asked for, make the connection they were looking for or just ask them if they don't mind being added to your mailing list. Do not send out a generic email to everyone on the list, especially not the ones you haven't even met.



Connect with people on LinkedIn and Twitter. When you connect on LinkedIn, make sure that you personalise the contact request. Say you met them at that event and that you'd like to connect. It doesn't have to be long, but make sure it's personal.

Join their social media groups. Some networks, such as 4N, have an online forum you can join and participate in (the "Can you help" section is particularly good for this) and most networks have a LinkedIn group you can join. Make sure that you participate in anything you join, though. Post interesting articles, give tips and advice and help people make connections.

10. Stick at it

The best way to make networking work for you is by sticking at it. Don't go just once and then say it didn't work for you because you didn't meet anyone you could sell to. Go regularly and build up relationships with the people in the room. Keep offering to help and do also make it clear what you are looking for.

11. Become involved

Many networking organisations rely on their members running the groups, and it's well worth getting involved with a group, as this will raise your profile within the network. Of course, it will also mean more work, but remember that the only place where success comes before work, is in the dictionary. Choose the network that works best for you and then really become as involved as possible.



Some local & national networking organisations

There are many different networking organisations. Most of them are membership based, although there are also some that aren't (FSB and Only Connect for example). You will need to find out for yourself which one works best for you, as it really depends on your target audience, the area you want to operate in and the time of day you want to network. Here are some of the ones that operate in the Bristol and Bath area (and many of them beyond as well) – **updated March 2016:**

4Networking	(http://www.4networking.biz/)
Athena Networking	(http://theathenanetwork.co.uk/)
Avon Business Club	(http://www.avonbusinessclub.co.uk/)
BNI	(http://www.bni-am.com/)
Business Biscotti	(http://www.businessbiscotti.co.uk/)
Business Network SouthWest	(http://www.business-networksw.co.uk/)
Business Scene	(http://www.business-scene.com/home)
Business West	(http://www.businesswest.co.uk/events)
Enterprising Women	(http://www.enterprising-women.org/)
FSB	(http://www.fsb.org.uk/default.aspx?loc=119)
I am Woman	(http://www.iamwoman.biz/)
IBC	(http://www.ibr-bristol.co.uk/)
IoD	(http://www.iod.com/home/local-network/south-west/default.aspx)
Ladies who Latte	(http://www.ladieswholatte.com/index.htm)
NRG	(http://nrg-networks.com/)
Only Connect	(http://www.onlyconnect.me.uk/)
Referral Institute	(http://www.referralinstitute.com/)
SoleTraders United	(http://www.meetup.com/SoleTradersUnited/)
WomenMeanBiz	(http://www.womenmeanbiz.co.uk/index.htm)
Working Breakfast	(http://www.working-breakfast.com/)



Business Success & Happiness

A little bit about me:

I'm Inge Dowden and I'm the **Business Growth and Happiness Coach**, helping people be happy and successful at work. I offer both business coaching and career coaching, and I specialise in leadership and employee engagement. I believe that when you are happy, you are more motivated, creative and action orientated, which in turn will make you more successful.

My typical clients are owners and employees of small businesses who want to grow their business locally, nationally or even internationally and who realise that they need to be at their very best to achieve this. I use the DISC personality profiling system to help people understand themselves and others better, to improve communication and to avoid conflicts in the workplace.

I'm also the author of *"The Happy Worker: how to find a job you love and love the job you have"*, which is available to buy from **Amazon** or through the website **www.thehappyworker.co.uk**.

Inge Dowden

*"Because you deserve nothing less
than happiness and success"*



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