

MAKING NETWORKING WORK



E-Report written by
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‘How to Run a Business from your Kitchen Table’

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MAKING NETWORKING WORK!

WHAT IS NETWORKING?

An important way to develop a business is by Networking. This is important because you need to have a network of: -

- Suppliers
- Peers (mentors; business operators; potential alliances etc)
- Customers
- Potential customers

Remember, networking is not about making sales. Networking is about making contacts. You use the same tools to look after your customers as you do to look after your larger network. If you only go to functions attended by people you know, you are not networking – you are socialising. To network you have to meet new people.

You can ‘grow’ your business by building your network, but you must approach networking as a long-term investment, and plan your strategies accordingly. Results from networking do not occur over night. Often it is the contacts of your initial network contact that offers the greatest reward via referrals.

BUSINESS ATTITUDES



It is important to think about your philosophy and approach to business. For years now, we have been told that we must consider business in terms of ‘*What’s In It For Me*’ (called WIIFM). This is wrong! A better approach is ‘*What Can I Do For You*’, with the **outcome** of this being WIIFM!!

By nature most people are caring and find it easy to offer assistance when a friend or acquaintance is in trouble, but it is not so easy to have your mind constantly alert to assist or support someone you meet during the course of your business.

When making contact with someone, be alert to them mentioning such things as trying to source a product or service. If you are able to suggest a contact, do so. Do not expect to get something in return. It is this expectation that can let you down. Do it because you want to ‘help’.



BUSINESS CARDS

A business card is a great way to promote your business and is your main networking tool. If you were a builder, would you go to work without your hammer and nails - your tools? Yet many businesses go to networking functions without their *only* tool – their business card!

NETWORKING PLAN

Networking is a long-term investment. Results from networking do not occur over night. You should have a networking plan to chart out the following;



- what do you want to achieve from your networking eg, new contacts and eventually sales
- how many networking groups do you want to belong to, eg, church groups, women's groups
- the type of acquaintances you need to make for your future business development - not only customers but also people who can offer you advice and assistance eg small marketing consultant
- how many networking functions you wish to attend within specified time frames eg, 2 x business, 2 x seminars and 2 x women's groups in three months
- how many actual acquaintances you expect to make within a specified time frame eg, meet 3 new contacts at each function (18 in total)
- the types of things you can do for those you network, eg, you could refer work to them or introduce them to other contacts, etc.

Be helpful. Always try to think of something that can be useful or of assistance to your new contacts

Case Study

1. Andrew Ludekens of Proclean, when attending functions where many potential clients have been brought together, uses the strategy of listening first, to see what they might want. Networking can be enjoyable personally and ultimately, from a business perspective, it is about customer focus.

Results can be slow. Andrew tries to see networking as Research and Development or a kind of physical customer survey and tries to enjoy it.

2. Angela Whitaker is relatively new to the networking concept but she estimates that her memberships of networking organizations and attendance at functions would cost about \$1000 a year. She tries to attend at least one function each month for each organization she has joined.

The difficulty of Networking for Angela, is finding the time to get to functions and her nerves when going into a room full of people she does not know. She often has to force herself to go but generally finds someone else is in the same boat and conversation begins.

3. Tina Blackmur of Write Creations sometimes contacts people she has networked with for advice on a project she is working on. In return, she would expect those people to do the same, as Networking is a 'two way street'.

LOOKING AFTER YOUR NETWORK

FOLLOW UP

Some of the things you can do to make your network feel special might include;



- sending a hand written note saying how glad you were to make their acquaintance. Ask them to send you information about their business. In return, most will ask you to reciprocate. You have now begun a business relationship, in an atmosphere of trust.
- inviting your contact as a guest to a function that may be of interest to them
- sending a newspaper or magazine clipping with a personalised note added to it, to bring something of interest to their attention

- sending a congratulatory note or card if they have achieved a milestone
- when referring someone to a contact, also let your contact know who you are referring and why
- contacts like to be asked for advice. By taking them into your confidence and demonstrating that you consider them and their advice to be valuable, you ensure a positive outcome. Often it is the network of your contact that is the most valuable, as you will be referred to others.
- Don't ever overuse or abuse your network contacts. Networking has a domino effect. You network with one individual who in turn may network you with three or four contacts, who in turn.... etc. etc. You only want good things said of you to these domino contacts!
- Remember not to speak badly of anyone - always be diplomatic if asked an opinion about a competitor or business acquaintance. As your network grows, you just never know if the person you are communicating with knows (or indeed, is a friend of) the third person.

BUILDING A NETWORKING RELATIONSHIP

Never try to make a sale when networking. Remember you are simply trying to make contact. You could say, *"I would love to make a time to see you next week, is it OK if I ring and make an appointment?"*

Networking is about building relationships and trust. The surest way to turn contacts away is by trying to push your product or services onto them. Remember the simplest way to build trust is by approaching your network with the thought in your mind, *'what can I do for you'*. If you can offer assistance, solve a problem, or offer support, a relationship which can *lead* to business will develop.

To convert network contacts into profit, you must be prepared to do something for the contact, without charging. This doesn't mean you give them expensive stock free, but you might give them a piece of your product at cost, if they are making a special presentation. You might introduce them to a provider of a cost-effective service you have found (maybe on the Internet). What you are actually doing is showing them that you can be trusted and that you are a caring individual.

ASKING FOR FAVOURS FROM YOUR NETWORK

- Feel free to ask a favour from your network contact. You have earned that right by already having offered to assist them. Always leave a comfortable “out” when asking the favour eg “*Can you do such and such for me? If you can't manage that at the moment, perhaps you could suggest someone else I could ask?*” Not only do you leave a way out, you make them feel valuable by being given the opportunity to network you on to another contact.
- Don't make the favour a monetary one, eg, don't ask them to place an order with you. Rather ask for a contact or introduction, or perhaps to assist with a negotiation or to give advice.
- If the person is in direct competition, don't ask for information, which they consider, gives them a competitive advantage. Not only won't they give you the information, but they could be quite rude about it!
- The reason you have to work so hard at being a ‘*nice guy/gal*’ is to develop a relationship with your network contacts. It is this warm, friendly, caring relationship you develop, which will ensure that you are referred on, by your initial contact.
- Don't think ‘*I'll do this so that I can ask them to do something for me*’ - in other words you do it because you actually believe in the philosophy of ‘*what can I do for you*’ - the returns will be nothing short of amazing.
- Be proactive by networking different contacts together that you feel may be appropriate. You have to have a good memory, and make use of your data base to ensure that this approach will work.
- Be conscious all the time of ‘*What Can I Do For You*’.
- If you do this well and often enough, you will soon have a number of people asking you for assistance. Every time you assist a contact, it allows you to ask for a favour in return.

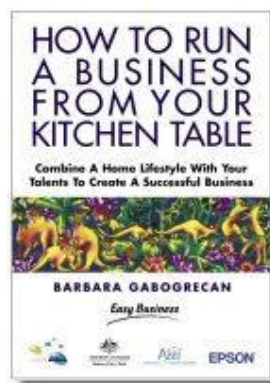
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The best selling book, **‘How to Run a Business from Your Kitchen Table’** is a *must* for those who are determined to build their business via networking skills. Over 50 Micro business operators tell how important networking was to them in developing and growing their business. Networking and dozens of other topics and skills are discussed in a user friendly and ‘chatty’ manner - easy to read, easy to emulate!

It is available at the special price of \$25 plus postage.

You can read more about this great business resource on:-

<http://www.micronavigator.com.au/display/text/1076492620718-2686/parentContent/1073989004879-5934/>



TIP

You can join a group of successful business operators (members of Micro Biz Navigator) for FREE – simply go to www.micronavigator.com.au then Register (just below the Members Login on the left of the screen.) Give yourself a username and password and you can have your business profiled. There are many more opportunities for business operators via this fantastic online support network.

RESOURCES

You may find these products of great assistance to your business.

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Barbara Gabogrecan is a 4 year trained teacher and Certificate 1V Workplace Assessor. She is an artist, and author, a speaker, an entrepreneur and a mentor. She will guide you through your business procedures and assess your efforts.

Barbara is a Mentor extraordinaire

Barbara also consults to Australian Government and has sat on the following committees:-

- * Micro Business Consultative Group
- * Business Entry Point Consultative Group
- * National Small Business Forum
- * ATO Task Force
- * ATO Commissioner's Small Business Consultative Group
- * City of Manningham Task Force
- * Small Business Policy Committee (Vic Liberal Party)

For more information on Barbara and what she has achieved over the years (you can also view some of her beautiful art work) go to:-

<http://www.barbaragabogrecan.com.au/index.php?module=Website&action=Text&content=1103419621061-4471>