

Long-Term Business Planning

Networking your business doesn't stop after an event or meeting. Now is the time to build new relationships and grow the ones you currently have. If the events you went to this year were successful, plan ahead and budget for next years. Follow-up with new prospects and reach out to those already in your network.

Keep track of the conferences you attend each year. Create a spreadsheet with information about the name and location of the meeting or conference, if there were any travel or sponsorship costs, etc. Make other informational notes about the conference and if any revenue or new prospects came from it. Seeing everything laid out on a spreadsheet can help determine how beneficial this years networking event or meeting was, and based on that, you will decide if you are going to attend next years event.

If you feel that a meeting or conference wasn't as profitable as you would have liked it to be, don't write it off immediately. If you accomplished a lot of networking and found it informational, give it another try. Not only will you continue to build relationships, but you will also continue gain more exposure for you and your business.

So, you have just returned from a networking event or conference and you have all these great ideas and a handful of business cards. Your first step is to organize those cards and put your networking skills to use. The best way to do this is to purchase a card scanner. A great resource is www.cardscan.com. Using your card scanner, you can upload all of the information from each business card. It has a space for website, telephone and fax numbers, business name and contact, address, and new media contact information such as Twitter and Facebook handles. You can easily reference them when needed, and they will be all in one place.

If you choose not to use a card scanning device, devise another way to keep them organized. A helpful hint is to separate them into three piles; make one for prospective clients, a second for useful networking contacts, and a third pile for miscellaneous. Then, take those three piles and break them down once more into different categories based on who would be interested or benefit from using your service immediately and will be successful in leading you to more networking opportunities.

Decide who you would like to contact immediately and do it within 48 hours. You don't want to wait too long because you want the memory of you and the conversation you had to still be fresh in the mind of the person you spoke with. Simply send a quick E-mail to remind them about you, your business, and what you spoke about at the conference or meeting.

If you want to use new media tools, LinkedIn is one of many great resources to use if you are aiming to build your network. Begin by sending and accepting invitations from business people you already know. As you meet people at conferences and trade shows, trade business cards so that you can connect with them. Most people put their new media contact information on the cards. If you are on any of the same media websites, find them and connect with them.

When building relationships using new media, you need to go the extra mile to get to know your connections. It is easy to accept an invitation to from anyone, and not pay much attention after that. You want to make sure that your network is viewing what you have worked so hard putting together for them to see. Find ways to connect with them on a personal level by setting up individual meetings to speak further. If you can establish a personal connection, they are more likely to not scroll over something you send to them. After making that initial contact,

you want to continue to stay connected to build a business relationship. If you have set a date to speak with them further, have your meeting with them planned out. Start by reinforcing the reason you are both there and make your conversation specific and to-the-point. End the conversation, reminding them again about your proposal and give them a number to reach you.

Turn those short term follow-ups into long-term business connections. Take a look at different ways you can reach out to your network. Before you attend a network event or conference, think of resources you can share so when you make a networking connection, you can mention that you will send them a link to that resource. Send new contacts a copy of a business newsletter, asking them to sign up. If you host a webinar, inform them of your next show or E-mail them a link to a past one. Get them involved on your Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn page.

With some organization and planning on how you will follow-up, you will continue to make strides in increasing your business network and exposure as an industry expert.