

Networking, Marketing and You

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When you only have one chance to make an impression, you want to be sure it will be a lasting one. Networking events and conferences are great places to meet people and introduce them to what you or your business can do for them. But doing so is more than a confident greeting to one another. Here are some proven techniques to make your first impression a lasting one and develop a network of contacts into long term business relationships.

Have you ever been to a networking or conference event before and wondered, where do I begin? To start, you need to break the process down into three simple parts: 1) doing your homework, 2) conducting yourself at the event, and 3) following up after the event.

In preparing for the event, ask for a list of attendees, and do a little homework before-hand. Make a list of those you want to meet. Research names of those you aren't so familiar with. There may be a person of interest that you weren't aware of before. Even better, send a quick-email or make a phone call. Let them know who you are, where you plan to be at the event, and that you are looking forward to meeting them. This can be a good icebreaker prior to meeting them for the first time.

Be ready with your elevator pitch. An elevator pitch is a short 30-second summary of who you are and your background. Practice in a mirror or ask a friend to help. The more comfortable you are saying it, the more relaxed and natural you will appear.

Dress appropriately. Wear a color that stands out, without being too loud or tacky. A lunch event would be more casual than an evening event. Choose an outfit with pockets to hold business cards. Remember your name tag. At a networking event, a name tag is an integral part of your outfit. Make sure it's placed where easily seen by others. Pin it on your right side, so when shaking hands it is in the other person's line of vision. If you already have a company name-tag, use that instead. Be sure your name is displayed in neat, large letters, so it is easy to read. For name tags hanging on a lanyard, shorten the length so it sits up higher and is more visible.

Be prepared with a pen and notepad. You never know when you might need to write something down. Networking events are a prime place to gather, as well as distribute business cards. Be sure to bring plenty. You never want to run out of cards when meeting people. Write down your number on the card. It helps create a more personal connection. Keep cards of those you are interested in one pocket, and others you are not sure about in another. As you meet people, write notes on the back of their card for reference later.

Typically, networking events supply snack foods and beverages to enjoy. You may want to eat before you attend the event or meeting. This will allow you to meet people and write things down without being distracted. If you decide to eat at the event, eat early on. Use that opportunity to start conversation by commenting on the food.

Now that you have planned who you will be meeting with, practiced your elevator speech, and have your name tag on, it's time to mingle. The key is to move around the room and meet as many new people as possible. Stand in high traffic areas such as the doorway or food area.

Greet others with a firm hand shake and solid eye contact. Approach individuals. Try to avoid groups of two as they may be holding an important conversation. Never approach someone on their way to the restroom or if they seem momentarily distracted. Wait until they have returned or when you have their full attention.

Make a connection with people by asking what interests them most about the event and what they hope to gain from it. People attend networking events for many reasons. Ask them what their line of work is, where their office is located, etc. Repeat names when speaking. It makes the conversation personal as well as making it easier to recall a name later on. Introduce people you have met to others. You never know what networking opportunities may arise. Have your business cards ready to handout when you make a connection. Arrive a little early so you get a chance to meet other attendees, as well as the speaker, before the event begins. Ask if the speaker needs any help setting up. Make a short introduction, and let them know you are looking forward to their presentation.

After the event, keep your information organized by scanning business cards you collected into your computer. For those contacts you wish to follow up with immediately, send an email or make a short phone call to schedule a time to speak further. Introduce yourself again, and remind them about your conversation at the event. The rule is to do so in 48 hours. The goal is to take these contacts and turn them into long-term business relationships.

Depending on your line of work, you may ask them to stay connected with you via mailing lists, newsletters or blogs. If the event was beneficial, make sure you plan to attend other meetings by the same speaker or similar events. This will not only improve your networking skills, but also expand your networking circle. By following these simple tips, you will soon have a strong list of contacts with whom to network and do business.