

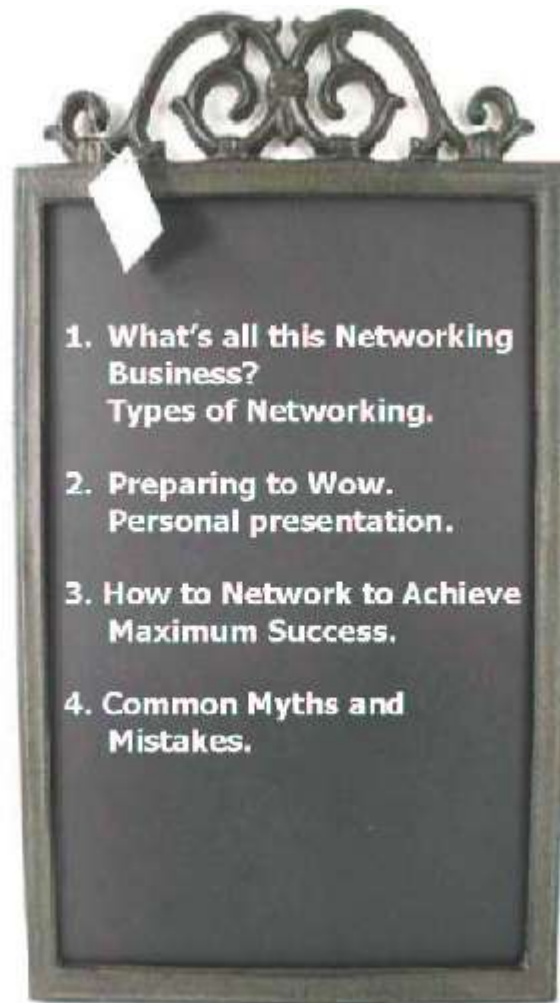
cut to the chase
speed networking



How to make **networking** your most powerful marketing tool

by Laretta and Jamie Wright





What's all this Networking Business?

If you're asking yourself "Should I network?" the most fitting answer to this question is "Can you afford not to?" The business world is driven by relationships and the power of personal relationships is so great that it can mean the difference between winning over a new client, being chosen as the successful job candidate, or being introduced to people that can make a difference to your business. Think about the saying "It's not what you know, it's who you know".

Now think about your circle of friends. Why is it that you are friends with them? Why are you willing to help them at the drop of a hat? Who listens to their problems? Provides advice? Lends a sympathetic ear? You. Why? Because you know, like and trust your friend. And it's exactly the same in the business world where personal relationships are usually formed with people who know, like and trust one another – an essential component of sales and a main reason why business deals are successfully closed.

And it's for this reason why so many business professionals rely on networking efforts to increase their personal relationships and ultimately boost their business.

With the world getting tougher and business competition increasing you almost feel the need to reinvent yourself just to get noticed, not just once but continually. How do successful businesses remain successful? They make it their business to widen their spheres of influence for new contacts and relationships. Not just once, but time and time again.

It's estimated that the average person knows 250 people. And these 250 people know another 250 people and so on...word of mouth and recommendation are the most powerful testimonials you'll ever have and access to a wide network of contacts from all walks of life will ensure that you can start building your network of contacts, start targeting your industries and get to know the people that can ultimately help drive your business growth.



Types of Networking

While online social networking sites have their advantages, nothing is better than a face-to-face meeting with a firm, friendly handshake. There is a wide variety of networking groups that cover both local, national and international levels.

REMEMBER: Networking is an investment, not a nuisance.

Putting in time to build your network will save time when you need to get things done. Well networked people don't have to waste time emailing strangers, purchasing contact database lists or spending hours poring over CVs. They just get in touch with their contacts who they know will be able to help.

Networking events can be an unhurried lunch affair, an announcement or awards ceremony followed by the opportunity to network, can take the form of speed networking, as Cut To The Chase offers, or even a purposeful seminar or workshop activity.

Each and every type of networking event brings its own advantages and disadvantages which depend on a number of factors but namely, (a) what type of person you are (b) how you interact with people and (c) what type of business you offer.

We would always advise someone looking to start networking that they need to answer these questions to determine what type of networking event they would feel most comfortable and happy with.

How to make NETWORKING your most POWERFUL Marketing Tool

Most networking groups have membership, with some making this compulsory before you can attend meetings. Many groups allow you to attend the meeting once or twice to become familiar with the setup before being asked to join. And some don't offer any membership or it's not compulsory. This is down to personal preference.

Aim to set up meetings with people following the event with the intention of becoming better acquainted, finding out what their needs are and how you can positively impact their lives.

Remember the reason you went to the event in the first place? To develop more referral business.

Loosely speaking if you enjoy leisurely breakfasts, lunches or dinners or enjoy traditional (or conventional) networking events where you have an opportunity to break in and out of groups at your leisure, you may prefer a more slow paced type of networking setting. The main advantages of this type of event are that you develop your confidence skills at having to 'work the room' and introduce yourself to people and that because you are speaking with fewer people you have the chance for more in-depth conversations to explore and understand people's businesses and how you can help each other. The disadvantages are that people may form cliques, you don't get to meet many people and if you are poor at making excuses you may get stuck with someone you'd rather not be talking to.

If, however, you enjoy meeting new people and also like the opportunity to learn new things you may consider looking at networking groups that continually attract new people or those that make it their mission to employ some fantastic guest speakers.

If you're unsure of what to try – try them all! The more networking you do, the more your business will grow – over time. Just one visit to a networking event will give you an indication of the type of people that it attracts and its format. If it suits your lifestyle and you get a good vibe from the event, chances are that you're on to a winner. Some networkers go to as many different events as they can, so may see the same familiar faces again and again.

Preparing To Wow

Preparation, as with most things, is the key to success. Knowing what your goals are and knowing where you want to be, will ensure that you'll be heading in the right direction. After all, if you don't know what you want how can you make sure you get it? Preparation for business networking will save you plenty of time and effort at a later stage and will set you up to know exactly what you want from an event. There are a number of things you can put into practice – both prior to a networking event, during the event and after the event.

Before The Event

Networkers who take the time to prepare for an event know exactly what they want to achieve and waste no time in getting out there and meeting their goals. Follow these steps to ensure everything goes smoothly...


Practise The Pitch

Make sure you have perfected your elevator pitch (see page 9 on how to do this). Try to make it sound chatty and natural rather than recited – you'll only end up sounding like a robot. Whatever you do – don't read from paper – this is highly unprofessional and if you can't remember what you offer, what benefits you bring and why you are unique then perhaps you're not quite so passionate about your business as you think. Depending on who you are meeting you might like to make slight changes to your elevator pitch.

Unique Ways of Thinking

Have a long hard think about what you offer. Who are your customers? What do they like? Why would they need your service or product? Now think about how your business might be linked to other services or products. For example if you're a photographer specialising in weddings your customers will almost certainly be purchasing flowers for their big day, along with a cake, wedding attire, transport etc...So if you happen to meet a toastmaster at a networking event (or meet someone who offers any of these related or linked services, or indeed

knows someone that offers them) you need to be liaising with them quite closely to determine if there is an opportunity to be mutual preferred partners.



What do I offer?

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The idea being that you can refer your customers to your new contacts and vice versa. Networking is not about selling what you offer, but rather meeting new people and turning them into long term credible relationships in which to do business.

It's not what you know – it's who you know, so before an event make a list of the types of affiliate relationships you would like to build. You may not meet that person directly but you may meet someone who can make an introduction to someone you'd like to meet and do business with.

Friends – Not Enemies



Think about your competitors and now apply the same logic. Can you depend on their help when you're over-stretched and could they do the same for you? Out-sourcing to similar companies will help you get through your busiest times and welcoming new leads from others will see you through the quiet ones.

Perhaps your services differ slightly from your competitors – they need to know what you offer as these companies are in a great position to recommend you to their clients. Similarly, be aware of everything they offer so you can recommend people to them. So next time you meet 'a competitor' at a networking event, go out of your way to get to know them. Perhaps suggest you meet for a coffee to explore mutually beneficial opportunities. If you don't ask, you don't get..

Who Do You Know?

Start thinking about your wider network of contacts. Who do you know? What skills do they have? Who are they looking to meet? If you're not sure – ask them. If you need to, make a note of your close contacts, their skill-set and how they are looking to grow. You may be able to offer help to someone you meet at an event, by making an introduction to someone you know. Do this and both parties will have no qualms about recommending you to the people you want to meet.

How you approach business networking can make all the difference to how successful you are at it. You'll find that before long opportunities seem to appear out of nowhere. If you're genuinely interested in helping people and have a good ear for opportunities that can benefit the new contacts you meet, you'll find that people are automatically drawn to you and you'll be at the forefront of their mind when they come across an opportunity that would be right for your business.

Come Equipped

Make sure you are well-equipped with plenty of business cards. The last thing you want to happen is to run out of cards during an event and start fumbling about for scraps of paper to note down your details.

Some people make a habit out of handing out two business cards to the people they meet – one for them and one to give away to someone they think would like it. This is a good idea in theory but it's wise to be selective about who you do this with – you don't want them thinking you're looking for a quick fix way of spreading the word about your business – through them.

Personal Presentation

The way you present yourself to others is deserving of some special attention to detail. So many people get this wrong and like body language, can send out the wrong signals – without you even realising. Equally, what is important to women can be viewed completely differently to what men find important and vice versa.

As a general rule of thumb make sure you are smart yet comfortable. You don't want to be nervously tugging at your clothes if they are too tight or turn up all hot and flushed when you've decided to don a double-breasted winter suit on a hot summer's day.



If you have no idea what clothes suit you – be it the style, cut or colour, consider hiring the help of an image consultant to get you on the right track. It could be money worth investing. Most consultants even offer personal shopper experience to kit you out with a new wardrobe if you really want to dress to impress – for all occasions. At the very least both men and women should own at least two suits that fit them well and that they feel comfortable in.

Before we look at specifics, there are several other things to consider while getting ready for the event. It goes without saying that hands (including fingernails) should be clean hair is clean and combed, teeth have been brushed and you've used deodorant. Networking events can become very busy, you'll be on the move and talking most of the time – it's hard work. If you look good, you'll feel good and if you feel good you'll exude confidence (not to be confused with arrogance). People are naturally drawn to confident people.

The Details

According to top image consultant Marcia Almestad of MCA Image Consultancy there are a number of golden rules for both men and women to follow to ensure you are dressing for success.

Tips for Women

1. Remember that grooming is important. It's better to keep linen fabrics for a more leisurely and personal event and stick to well ironed and less flashy colours or pattern fabrics – unless you are confident enough at carrying any of these off.

2. Clothes should be comfortable and not need "slight adjustments" when sitting or standing.



3. It's a good idea to avoid wearing multi-strand necklaces or several bangles as there's nothing more distracting than the jangle of jewellery when people are trying to listen to you speaking. It's amazing how many speakers tend to forget the impact this can have on an audience – especially when there's a microphone nearby!

4. At all costs avoid strong perfumes. We all differ in preference and some people could find this a real turn-off and form unfair first impressions.

5. It's good to wear a jacket with two pockets – one to keep your own business cards in and one to put other people's business cards in – this avoids them getting mixed up.

Tips for Men

1. If you choose to wear a suit and tie, investing in one good tie that makes you feel and look good will detract from a well worn suit or shirt. Your clothes will also need to fit you comfortably in order for you to feel confident and relaxed. You want to make the other person feel that meeting them is a special experience for you and that you appreciate their valuable time. Remember, you're not simply selling your knowledge, you're selling yourself.

2. Clean shaven is always best. However, if you do prefer a beard or moustache, please ensure it's neat and well cut.

3. Best to leave any nose/tongue/eyebrow piercings at home and cover any tattoos.

4. Practise good hygiene when dressing for the meeting. I don't think I need to say more about this.

5. Avoid strong aftershaves at all costs. Everyone's taste and opinions are so different so this could impact your meeting in a negative rather than positive manner, sadly.

6. Avoid bulging pockets filled with items such as cigarettes/coins/keys and make sure you keep your and other peoples' business cards in separate pockets so they don't get mixed up.



How To Network to Achieve Maximum Success



The word 'networking' can send some people into a blind panic, as people imagine they'll have to 'put on a brave face', endless questioning and even perhaps having to stand up in a roomful of strangers to announce what they do. It's a feeling of dread for some people and you'll spot the ones who feel like this, as they'll be the ones standing in a corner or with their back to a wall, arms folded looking uncomfortable and not making eye contact and more to the point not smiling.

But it doesn't have to be like that. You care about your business. You want to succeed. You want people to know your company exists and what you have to offer. Remaining positive and confident in yourself and your abilities means you're halfway there. The rest, as they say, is easy.

Networking is merely engaging people in conversation to explore similarities – both socially and in a business sense. People do not attend a networking meeting to keep their heads down and their mouths shut. They are looking to meet new people all the time. Remember that the average person knows approximately 250 people. Experienced networkers know that access to one person's network of contacts provides huge untapped potential to effectively promote themselves through word of mouth and recommendation – and there's no better marketing than that. The key to what makes successful people different from everyone else is the way they use the power of relationships. The sharing of knowledge, resources, time, and energy with people they know and trust is the foundation of their success.

During An Event

Asking the right questions

In speed networking you'll have a series of one-to-one mini meetings with the other attendees, which typically lasts between 3-4 minutes each. When you have found out what people do, make sure you ask interesting questions – not where they live or how they got to the event, but questions that will leave a lasting impression. Find out as much as you can about their business. Questions such as "Who is your best client?" "What are your future goals for your business?" and possibly the most important question of all "How can I know if someone I meet or speak with would be a good prospect for you?" (i.e. What type of people are they looking to meet?) Nothing builds trust and credibility more with someone than referring business to them whenever possible. Plus the answers to your questions will ensure that you get all you need to determine how you can help this person (and will also mean you'll be remembered as someone that looks for opportunities to help others).

Learning to listen

When you've asked your questions - listen. The key to successful networking is to listen, or better described by H Jackson Brown Jr: "Learn to listen; opportunity sometimes knocks very softly." Good listening involves not just hearing what is being said, but understanding it and then translating this information into how you can relate to it. For example, someone may briefly mention they're thinking about exporting their product overseas and guess what? You are on good terms with a drop-shipping company. It's about spotting an opportunity for you to help someone (either via your contacts or what you know) and to look for ways in which you can work together.

So rather than wonder how you can turn the conversation back to you, show an interest in what is being said by asking open-ended questions – the 'whats' 'whys' and 'hows'. Ask questions that will boost their confidence such as "What do you enjoy most about what you do?" You're giving them something very positive to associate with you and your conversation, making them feel special and important – a great start to building that all-important rapport.



It's all in the delivery

REMEMBER: THE Golden Rule of Networking is Following Up.

Fail to do this and you've only wasted your own time. Also people you've clicked with may get the impression you are insincere. It might take months to develop new contacts that can help boost your business in more ways than one, so make sure the reputation you earn is a good one

Now it's your turn to deliver your "elevator pitch" and you'll want to be telling people what you offer, why you are unique, who you are looking to meet and what your plans/goals are for the future. So rather than "Hi, I'm Sue - I'm a clothes alterations specialist" try... "*Hi, I'm Sue and I offer a clothes alterations service which ranges from taking up a pair of jeans through to bridal and special occasion wear. I set myself apart from other local businesses as I guarantee next-day delivery. I'd like to expand into offering a personal shopper experience, so I'm keen to meet fashion retail owners as well as beauty therapists to look at teaming up with them. Incidentally, I like your tie!*" Explain any guarantees. Also let people know who you want to be referred to specifically (as exemplified above) – don't tell people you're looking to meet "anyone" as you'll usually get referred to nobody – it's not specific enough. Telling people who you are looking to meet (rather than reel off a sales pitch) encourages others to start thinking about their wider network of contacts. Make yourself stand out and offer a warm smile.

After The Event

Don't over promise and under-deliver. If you say you'll call or email someone – do it. And if possible do it before you said you will. Exceed expectations as slack business practices will see you come across as unprofessional.

Any successful networker will tell you that the golden rule in any business networking is 'following up'. The great thing about speed networking for example is that you will have personally met and spoken with all the attendees, which makes it easier to contact them following the event.

Before you do this though it helps if you jot down your ideas on what you'd like to speak to the contact about and what result you want from the conversation (i.e. to arrange a face to face meeting to discuss ideas of helping each other, to ask for advice or information, to ask for a referral to someone they mentioned when you met or to pass on information that can help them) Don't wait for people to contact you – Feel the fear and do it anyway!

Remember that networking is a marketing tool and not just an event you turn up at. Sending people an email is fine, but a phone call is much friendlier and will ensure you are better remembered. The magic of speed networking happens in the weeks and months following the event – and if you avoid following up with people, you'll only have wasted your time.

Remember people buy from people they like. Be likeable!

Ask questions, be sincere, smile and be genuinely keen to develop your referral base by looking to help others.

Common Myths and Mistakes

Push the Boat Out.

Try to make it your mission to be remembered by people at events. Whether it's complimenting them on a part of their attire or wearing something memorable yourself.

If you get good vibes from someone - ask them to meet outside of the event and buy them a coffee - then get talking. Do this regularly with people that both YOU can help and those that you believe can help you.

There are lots of myths surrounding business networking, the most popular being that it involves lots of standing around talking to discerning gentlemen in their power suits and that you'll have to 'go out on a limb' to sell sell sell your business. No, no, no!

Business networking has grown extensively in the last few years and there are plenty of different types of events each tailored to suit differing needs. The days of aggressive selling as a successful marketing technique are long gone.

Networking is about meeting like-minded individuals, making new contacts and developing credible relationships. It should be inspiring, informative and most importantly fun. There are however a few rules of networking that you should abide by if you want to make it your mission to win new business and overtake your competitors.

Follow these rules and you'll be networking like in pro in no time...



1. **DON'T**... Make False Promises (or over-promise and under-deliver)! By making insincere gestures or promises you're giving false hope and will come across as untrustworthy and not someone to do business with. Only say what you intend to act on.
2. **DON'T**... Give people the one-liner! An interesting introduction will ensure you are remembered – and if people remember you, you're halfway there. Add humour if it's appropriate but avoid personal humour – it's speed networking, not speed dating!
3. **DON'T**... Give people your life story! Remembering that listening is the key to success at speed networking. (two ears, one mouth!) as you'll only have a few minutes to listen to what is being said. Ask open-ended questions and determine if you have common ground with that person or the possibility of an opportunity to help one another. Useless information about the weather or that the coffee is too hot is just that – useless.
4. **DON'T**... Judge on first impressions! When you meet someone who tells you they are a florist, don't immediately dismiss them because you're not looking to buy flowers, ask them how they are looking to grow (no pun intended) and what types of people they'd like to meet. Listening to what people have to say is far more important – and more beneficial to you, than judging purely on what people wear and more importantly, what they do. That florist might just be a good friend of your ideal client!
5. **DON'T**... Fail to follow up! At the event you should have identified a handful of people that you can both help and that may also help you – so reach for the phone – the sooner the better while the contact is hot and start growing your business.
6. **DON'T**... Believe "Tramp" is the new "Vamp"! Make sure your personal hygiene (and this includes dental!) is spot on. Wear clothes that are clean but that you are comfortable in. If you're not a suit wearer, don't wear one. Psychologically-speaking if you look good, feel comfortable and smell nice you'll feel more confident.
7. **DON'T**... Expect Instant Results If you expect instant results following an event, you're asking too much. It does happen of course, but very infrequently. In general, getting to know someone and developing a credible relationship with them is a slow-burn process. The more you engage in conversations and contact the people you meet to find out what's happening in their business or to ask for advice, the easier it becomes for them to refer someone to you, as you will remain at the forefront of their mind. It's about identifying contacts and nurturing your new relationships (which takes time) which naturally leads to profitable referral partners.

cut to the chase
speed networking



How to make NETWORKING your most POWERFUL Marketing Tool

The Amateur Networker	The Professional Networker
Feels and behaves nervously. Usually found at the side or back of the room 'hiding' and waits for others to make introductions.	Usually arrives early or right on time. Is confident on arrival and engages with the organisers and the other early arrivers.
Uses the phrase "I'm just a..." when describing what they do.	Presents an interesting and thought-provoking elevator pitch then switches the conversation back to the person they're talking with.
Finds it difficult to ask people questions or talks endlessly about themselves, their business, why they're great...	Asks open-ended questions and takes a genuine interest in what people are saying, wanting to know as much as possible about the person and their goals for their business.
Rarely looks to spot a business opportunity where they can help someone.	When speaking with both familiar faces and new contacts is all the while thinking "Is there an opportunity for me to help this person?".
Listens to what people say but doesn't 'hear' them, preferring instead to turn the conversation back to themselves.	Seeks to develop affiliate relationships with both competitors and non-competitors or is keen to offer advice and information where appropriate.
Tries to sell at an event with this being their primary objective.	Introduces the familiar faces to new contacts if they haven't met before. Is always looking to further other people's contacts.
Facial expression is usually solemn or smiles insincerely.	Adopts a friendly expression with open body language and is usually the person having the most fun at an event.
Looks for familiar faces to speak with, rarely venturing out to engage with new people.	Is always looking for new faces to meet and learn about what they do. Will always put new networkers at ease and look to introduce them to others.
Fails to follow up after an event or sends a blanket email out to all attendees selling their product or service.	Always follows up after an event – usually by calling not emailing and looks to go one step further by taking someone out for a coffee.

Try something different for business networking. Join a *Cut To The Chase* event and enjoy a more pro-active approach to growing your business

- Speak with every single attendee in a series of one-to-one mini meetings
- Cost-effective - no compulsory membership or joining fees
- Time-efficient – you'll be 'cutting to the chase' and talking business in a structured format
- Inspirational guest speakers – our speakers are instructed to keep it short, informative and inspirational!
- Great incentives – refer a friend and receive £5 off your booking. Attend 5 events and get your 6th event free!
- Friendly, fun and informal – who said business had to be boring?

If you'd like to attend an upcoming *Cut To The Chase* speed networking event or find out how speed networking can help your business, give us a call on 020 8300 7584 or drop us an email at networking@cuttothechase.co