

Building Your Network, It's Not About You  
by  
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These days when people talk about building their network, they are usually thinking about an online network such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn etc. And, although I agree that this type of social networking is very important in our day and age, it shouldn't override the original social network, going out and talking with people face to face. To really get recognized in business, you need both social networks, online and face to face.



However, no matter what you choose, good networking shouldn't be all about getting sales. To be successful as a business person, you need to be trusted, and people won't trust you if all they see is someone who is trying to sell them something.

When you meet someone, don't lead with a sales pitch. This will put people on their guard and they will hesitate to open up to you. Do it often enough and they will avoid you when they see you coming.

Instead, lead with a smile. Ask them about who they are and what they do. Not only ask, listen to the answer. People will notice whether or not you are paying attention. Be interested in what they do and remember them. Maybe you know someone who can use their services. Maybe you can use their services yourself. If you help them out, they will remember you.

When somebody new joins a networking group you are part of, introduce them to other business people you know. Help them to make connections and make them feel welcome in the group. Being the go-to person in the group will help you to stick in the new person's mind.

Tell people what you do, but don't spend all your networking time simply looking for customers. Not everyone you meet will need your services, but that doesn't mean that there is no purpose in talking to them. Maybe they know someone who could use your services, or they may meet someone who does at the very next networking group they attend. They may also have the type of service that compliments yours and you can collaborate on a project. Even if none of this applies, all connections are good connections, even if it only means that you have met someone new.

Online is the same, yet different. These days, people check out websites and social media when deciding who to do business with and you can and will be judged by who you connect with. You will also be judged by what you post and like, and by what your



connections post and like. So use caution. You don't need to connect with people who can only benefit you, but you shouldn't connect with people and sites that can harm your credibility. Remember that the Internet is forever, so you don't want to post something that may embarrass you in the future.

Once you have chosen your connections online, stay connected with them. Watch what they post and "like" comment and "share" things that interest you. Much like face to face networking, social media only works if you work it. You wouldn't go to a networking meeting and sit in a corner by yourself, not talking to anyone, so don't do it when you go on social media.

Will doing these things get you sales? Maybe, maybe not, but it's a start. What it will do is get you known, recognized and eventually trusted. People will think of you when they have a job in your line of work. They may even think of you when they meet someone else who needs work in your field. But you still have to prove that you are good at your job to get consistent business. Networking can help you to promote yourself, but at the end of the day it is your work that will make the final sale.

Networking, online or face to face, is not about making a sale. In fact, it isn't about you at all. It is about what you can do for others. If you take the focus off what you can get and focus instead on what you can offer, only then will you be successful at networking.

