



## **Networking ..... Is It Worth?**

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There likely has been no other term as widely discussed in the new business development arena than Networking. A SEA training class seldom concludes without the facilitator referring to this magical key to success. Most delivery agents dedicate a full session to the matter and many entrepreneurial consultants around town are making businesses of focusing on the subject exclusively.

But, is it worth it??????

The answer starts with an examination of its cost. As we all find out in new businesses, cost effective use of resources like time, seem to have a lot to do with success.

So, what are the costs? A lot of time....YES, a lot of money .... NO.

How many business plans address the monetary requirement for networking? ... Almost none. How many describe the same requirement for other forms of generating business, such as advertising? Your ability to manage time toward networking is crucial and of course whether or not you can afford the time. However, if your business is having sales difficulties you probably have at least some time for this process, because you will not be performing other tasks as originally planned. Proponents of networking agree that in order to get the most out of the time allocated to networking, you should consider a few things before taking the plunge:

A. Objectives - Are there specific things that your business needs now? Will the networking provide leads to new business? Or is it one of the many other things one can achieve? Information, Ideas, Referrals, Publicity, finding a mentor, seeking out best practice role models, finding experts, interfacing (not interfering) with your competitors, to name a few. Your objectives should be well defined ahead of time, and be realistic. Having up front objectives will ensure that you spend the time, concentrating on your business needs and maximizing the networking opportunity.

B. Where - Places for networking include seminars, breakfast meetings, trade shows, association meetings, etc. Work should be done up front, to be absolutely sure that where you are going will suit your objectives. Also, the type of event that you are going to, needs to be considered. Nowadays, many such events have been developed with the opportunity for networking as the main item on the agenda. Try to realize ahead of time what the purpose of the event really is. Without this, you may find that you are not dressed appropriately, you are among people that really can't

give you any help or that you have landed at a big Schmoozorama instead of a Networking Event. (A key indicator of this would be ... If alcohol being served. If so, you will probably meet a lot of people, who will forget they had a conversation with you.)

C. A Style - You need to develop a style that allows you to spend time with the people that you can help and will in turn help you. A positive style that will also allow you to disengage from those people that will not be part of your business's success.

D. A Message - Your message needs to be powerful enough to ensure that your business card is retained and used, instead of discarded when the recipient gets home. This includes a professional way of introducing yourself. A powerful ten second infomercial should include who you are, your business name, how you help people through your business and a hook. The hook should entice the person to ask a question that will allow you to go in to more detail. Your message must be practiced, but not canned. It should be genuine, sincere and delivered in a very friendly manner. Anything else won't work.

E. A Business Card.

F. Networking Perspective - Effective networking starts with the attitude that you are there to help other attendees with their business objectives first and foremost. Referrals to you and your business may then be possible. Seldom, if ever will you actually make customers of the people you meet while networking. The potential lies in your ability to access their circle of influence. There will have to be strong belief that you can actually be of help and that what you can do is valuable, before such referrals will occur. This "I scratch your back, you scratch mine" attitude has been criticized as "Old School". What's wrong with something that has worked for business owners for the last four or five millennia? By the way Oxford is an old school.

But, have we answered the question...is it worth it?

Some people answers yes...many say no. Among the ones that say yes, there is one common denominator. They usually say that the first time they went out networking they didn't get very many leads to help solve their current sales dilemma, but they do say that they found something else that was probably more important at the time. SUPPORT. You can't take support to the bank, but it sure comes in handy and most people can use a fair bit of it.

Many SEA Clients, usually express sooner than later, how lonely it is in the real world of self employment especially compared with the largest networking event of all; the Training Phase of the SEA Program.

Networking will allow you to get involved with people, lots of them, many experiencing your current success and failure, and who can empathize with you and

your situation. From this comes Help.....lots of it. No one can expect to successfully start a business without support.

So is it worth it??? You bet.

It's hard for most people to get out there and dedicate the time to this kind of activity. A lot of people feel that it's just not their thing to get out and meet people on a regular basis. In fact, generally speaking, most people actually fear this kind of contact. That is something that in one way or the other we all have to deal with.

Many people report, however in the face of their reluctance or even fear, this process was the one thing that got things moving. In fact, some say that it was the difference.

What an Opportunity!!!  
They say it was worth it!