



Ivan Misner: Networking

Less Networking Can Mean More

Cultivating the relationships you have is more effective than planting yourself at more events.
By Ivan Misner | October 29, 2007

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Referral networking is more about farming than hunting. An overemphasis on running from one networking event to another looking for new relationships is a waste of time, money and energy that you should be using to develop the relationships you've already started. It's like running around knocking coconuts out of trees, when you should be planting coconut trees for the future.

When we train people to network, we surprise them with one of the first things we tell them: Stop networking for a few moments. Stand still, look at what you have, prioritize it, database it, cull it, and then, rather than continue to work on only the "V" part of the [VCP Process](#) (visibility, credibility, profitability), devote more time to the "C" and the "P." Credibility comes with a closer, deeper relationship, and profitability is the goal that can be maintained only through constant nurturing of that relationship for mutual benefit. It's not "Nice to meet you; now I've got to go talk to someone over there." It's "How are you doing, and how can I help you achieve your goals?"

One reason that people feel compelled to "[Network](#), network, network," is that there aren't many sophisticated measurement systems that can tell you how successful a given referral tactic is in getting the results you want. For want of a better system, the "more is better" instinct takes hold, and off you go to yet another networking event. In actuality, all you're doing is adding to your cold-prospecting opportunities and looking for that one big sale.

The only measurable result of this sort of activity is whether you make an immediate sale. It becomes a lottery; for every contact made, it's a hit or, more often, a miss. The long-range success of relationship building isn't measured, because it doesn't happen. And yet, that's the real objective of referral networking: you want to develop relationships that will serve as conduits to other customers. The contact that counts, the one you turn into a referral connection by taking the time to develop a mutually beneficial relationship with, may never even buy your product or service. If your focus is the immediate sale, you're going to miss a lot of future opportunities.

Mike Garrison is vice president of the Referral Institute. Mike is a sought-after speaker, coach and consultant on business networking, referral marketing and Christian business topics. He shared the following story with me recently:

I know one couple, a highly successful two-person real-estate operation, that had so much business and developed so many referrals that they had to form a new networking group to find enough people to pass them to. They weren't looking for new referrals for themselves--just enough new people to handle all the business they were bringing to the groups. But unless you are just overwhelmed with business to pass along, I wouldn't recommend doubling up your strong-contact referral networking.

The truth is, you can attend too few networking meetings, but you can also go to too many. If you're in a strong-contact referral group, you're probably required to show up at the weekly meeting. There's a good reason for this, and it has to do with building and maintaining relationships with your referral partners in the group, keeping up with the different products and services they provide, and being there not only to receive referrals but to pass them to your networking partners as well. But if you make all your required, meetings and then proceed to spread yourself too thin by joining and attending a dozen other groups of various kinds, you're quickly going to run out of quality time for your partners.

You can also spread yourself too thin by getting more referrals than you can manage--in other words, too much of a good thing. Australia's top networking expert Robyn Henderson, author of *Networking for Success* tells us, "Many people make the mistake of establishing dozens of strategic alliances, forgetting that maintaining these alliances takes time, money and a lot of energy." Keeping these relationships healthy and productive means meeting your partners regularly and generating lots of good referrals for them--at the peril of neglecting your own core business.

Henderson's advice: "Aim for quality, not quantity." Set up your alliances so that you can conduct much of your face-to-face business over the phone or by teleconferencing or videoconferencing. Focus on three alliances in a given year, rank them in importance by your expectations, and scale your time on them accordingly. Track and evaluate your results. And don't over commit. Letting a referral relationship wither from neglect is more damaging than never having formed it in the first place.