

10 steps to effective networking at events

5-min read



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Sales success is never owned – it is only rented, and we pay the rent every day by continually adding new leads and contacts to the top of our funnels.

It's fascinating to see the number of BD professionals who consider lead generation to be "someone else's role." Events and conferences are a superb investment, but they need to be approached in the right way if we are to get full value from them.

1. Get your head right

If you're there to learn about the most recent developments in a specific sector, then we would suggest that you don't go. This information is readily available online. The reason that you're there is not the content but rather the contacts. The content can be very useful as a potential opening line as you network.

2. Prepare effectively

Who are your targets? What are your positioning statements? What is your goal? A lot of people are in the habit of turning up with a "let's see what happens" mentality as opposed to "let's make something happen." An effective goal is the number of qualified follow-up conversations that you've set up at the event, not the number of business cards.

3. Don't fall into the networking avoidance traps

Have you ever noticed how important e-mail becomes in breaks at conferences? Or how many people are striding purposefully around but not actually going anywhere? Or how we often pick up a shadow buddy who ends up sticking around for the whole break / conference? For some, meeting new people can be uncomfortable and all of us can come up with some amazing ways to avoid it if we want to. Don't become part of the crowd.

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4. Be aware of the non-verbal signals that people give out

People often ask when we train: “How do I break into a group?” My answer is typically – don’t. At least, not when a group is “closed”. By “closed”, I literally mean the way they’re standing. If they’re in a huddle all facing one another, the signal should be clear that they’re engaged. However, if they’re in an open or “V” stance, facing out, that’s a clear indication that they’re open to being approached. Remember we should listen with our eyes first.

5. Have some opening lines prepared

These don’t need to be complex or incredibly clever, just simple openers to get the other person talking. Some examples could be:

- The event itself: As mentioned earlier, the content can help you make contact by saying,

“What did you think about the point the last speaker raised on...”

- Shared experience:

“Did you get caught up in the tube strike on the way here too?”

6. Make it about them, not you

As Dale Carnegie once said, “The best way to be interesting is to be interested.” Showing a genuine interest in the other person is the best way to be remembered and to develop rapport, *not* boring them about how great you, your offering, your organisation, etc. are.

7. Have a great answer prepped for the question “What do you do?”

It should be concise and focused on the value you add, *not* the mechanics of what you do. It should also be followed quickly by the question “*and how about you?*” to keep the focus on them.

8. Learn your close

If there seems to be value in a follow-up conversation, set it up there and then and get their contact details. This is best done in a relaxed way, remembering that you aren’t there (typically) to sell what you do. You are there simply to open up conversations that may lead to a later meeting where you can develop a relationship. You can say something like,

“This obviously isn’t the appropriate time but, from what you’re saying, it sounds like there might be some crossover in what we do. Would you be open to getting together at some point for a coffee? There may be some areas where we could help, and I’d love to talk in more detail about...”

From there, you can either set a date or get their contact details so that you can call them at a time they expect.

9. Learn to disengage

Once the contact is qualified, remove yourself from the conversation. You're there to speak to a number of people, not to bore the pants off one!

10. Follow up, follow up, follow up

The most important principle is to ensure you follow up on whatever happens at the event. We recently spoke with a consulting client who, at organised events, demonstrated the value that they could provide and then sat back and waited (and waited and waited). A small percentage of contacts may chase you down if you use this strategy, but attendance at an event with no follow-up campaign (and time allocated to do this) is a recipe for failure. Send a note and then pick up the phone – doing this will uncover and develop opportunities.

To discover more about effective networking, [let's talk growth](#).