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Thank you for requesting this informational report. We hope you will find it to be both interesting and useful.

The 10 Steps to Prosperous Business Networking

Recently, a few trades people who were looking to increase their business networking efforts asked me where to begin. Since this topic seems to be at the top of many contractors' lists, as well as a very effective way to increase business, I thought I would address this subject in this report.

To begin networking, you need to join one or two business organizations. There are so many to choose from, but there are at least four types to consider:

Casual Contact Networks

These are general business groups that are composed of people from various, overlapping professions. They hold monthly mixers as well as regular business-focused seminars. These groups include Chambers of Commerce and similar organizations, and they offer a great opportunity to make contacts with many other local business people (a chance to build your contact sphere as well as your business). However, because they do not restrict membership to one person from each profession, you will most likely encounter your local competition at these groups' meetings.

Formal Contact Networks

These are business groups that meet weekly for the purpose of exchanging referrals. They often restrict membership to only one person per profession and tend to be very structured. These groups include Business Networking International (BNI) or local Chamber of Commerce referral networks. They offer a highly focused opportunity to build contact sphere relationships, but they do require a lot of commitment (building relationships is a journey, not a destination.) A word of advice: don't divide your loyalties; joining more than one of these groups may hurt your effectiveness.

Community Service/Civic Organizations

These groups provide an opportunity to give something back to the community, but they also offer the chance to meet and build relationships with local "movers and shakers." These groups include Rotary, Lions, and Kiwanis Clubs and they meet on a weekly or monthly basis. Be aware, though, that this type of group requires a long-term commitment and, in most cases, you can't discuss business.

Professional Associations

These are typically known as “knowledge networks.” Members tend to be from one specific industry, which is the case with the ASM (sub-contractors), BAGB (builders), NAHB (home builders), and NARI (remodelers). The goal of this type of group is to exchange information and ideas.

Professional associations (PA) can be broken down into three sub-groups:

PA 1: These are the industry associations that you join with the goal of increasing your company’s knowledge base.

PA 2: These are your customers’ industry associations that you join with the goal of attaining new business.

PA 3: These are your referral source’s industry associations that you join with the goal of building your contact network.

Professional associations offer a fantastic opportunity for industry-related training and advice, but keep in mind that your best customers, as well as referral sources, may belong to these groups as well. If this is the case, don’t hard-sell the group, as they will assume your only interest is monetary. Work to develop relationships by showing genuine interest in the group.

Depending on your time constraints, I suggest selecting at least one, possibly two of these groups to join. However, — and this is crucial — no matter which groups you participate in, remember this: What you do in these groups is net-WORK, not net-SIT or net-EAT. And if you want to build a prosperous word-of-mouth business, you **MUST** work the networks you belong to. This means you need to be involved — attend meetings regularly, maybe join a committee and offer support when asked.

Lastly, please remember that referrals won’t happen overnight. Members really need to feel comfortable with you — to get to know and trust you — before they will refer you to members of their personal network.

It is up to you which groups you eventually join, but I suggest joining a Professional Association for its industry support as well as a Formal or Casual Contact Network for its active business-building opportunities. If you enjoy giving back to the community, I suggest joining a Community Service organization in lieu of a Contact Network.

Now that you have joined a association or two here are ten steps to follow if you want to have a prosperous networking system.

1. Have Your Networking Tools With You All The Time

Be sure to always have your business cards with you when attending ALL networking events. It is best to keep them in a business card holder, which will protect them from getting damaged. Also be sure to have a name badge handy as well. Your name badge should include your name (in larger type), your business name and a business tag line (a three to five-word description of your business.)

Lastly, always be sure to carry a pen for jotting down notes on other's cards as well as a PDA or planner for scheduling meetings with any hot prospects or referral sources you meet.

2. Set A Goal For The Number of People You Want To Meet

Before you head out to a networking event, you should have a set number of new referral sources or prospects you want to meet. An excellent goal is two to four people. One way to achieve this goal is to ask the greeters at the registration table if you can see the attendee list. This will help you to make sure you meet the people with whom you want to become acquainted. Lastly, try to make it a habit of not leaving the event until you have met your new relationship goal — two to four people.

3. Act Like A Host Not A Guest

As in any new networking situation, it can be difficult — and sometimes uncomfortable — to introduce yourself to new business people. For those of you who tend to be a bit shy, one thing that has worked well for me is to act like a host, not like a guest. This actually puts you in a more outgoing mindset and thus you become much more active. Like when hosting your own get-together, try to focus on helping others. One way to accomplish this is to ask to become a visitor host for the networking groups you belong to. Another way is to make a conscious effort to introduce people you meet to others you feel would be a good prospect or referral source for them. These strategies will improve your networking skills as well as increase your visibility.

4. Listen And Ask The Five “W” Questions

One way to start and carry on a conversation with someone new is to listen for and ask the five “Ws” — who, what, when, where and why. Not only does this show interest and allow the two of you to really learn a lot about each other, it also teaches you how to support one another. This is a very effective way to build a good relationship very quickly.

5. Give Support When Possible

As I shared earlier, one tactic for relationship-building is to help another person. Thus, whenever possible, be sure to make an effort to support at least one person at each networking event you attend. This can be accomplished by informing them of upcoming networking events, providing them with an introduction to a possible referral source or prospect, or providing them with a self-referral — if you are in need of their services. Please keep in mind these words from Zig Ziglar: “People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.”

6. Deliver Your 60-Second Introduction

After you learn about what others do and what kind of business they are looking for, you want to share what you do in a 60-second introduction. But what should your 60-second introduction include?

Here's a breakdown:

- a. The Opening – Give your name (if you have not already) and your company's name.
- b. A Brief Description of Your Product or Service – Keep it short, you only have 60 seconds for the whole introduction.
- c. A Key Benefit – Create a one-to-two line benefit statement that summarizes the results your service provides to your clients
- d. How People Can Help You – Share with people how they can help you: Do they know of a good referral or referral source, an upcoming networking event, a speaking engagement?

Here are a couple examples of my 60-second introduction:

"I am Kevin Lister, owner of Paradigm Strategies. We are a business advising firm to the trades. We help business owners improve sales, cash flow and profits while making their operations more efficient and their people more productive. You could help me by introducing me to a business owner in the trades with two-plus employees who has talked about either growing their sluggish business or gaining control of their thriving business."

Another "How You Can Help Me" phrase I use is, "You could help me by introducing me to a business owner in the trades with two-plus employees who has mentioned that they have been working too many hours and not making the kind of money they feel they should be."

7. Exchange Business Cards With the People You Meet

Always be sure to ask the people you meet for two of their business cards, and then they will ask for two of yours. This is a nicer way to get your card into another person's hand. You want to keep your cards in your left pocket and put others' in your right. This prevents you from handing out someone else's business card.

8. Spend 15 Minutes or Less With Each Person You Meet

Try to stay focused on making contacts. When you meet interesting individuals with whom you want to spend more time, ask to set up a later meeting. This allows you more time to network at the event. Please don't try to close business while networking. Your focus is on building relationships, not on selling. Selling at these events can be a real turn-off.

Work on developing an effective and efficient interviewing system. Here is one I use that works well – I call it "The Four Magic Questions."

- a. What company do you work for? (Their answer will tell you whether they are a competitor, contact sphere member or prospect.)
- b. What is your target market/client? (Contact sphere or prospect?)
- c. What is your position? (Is this person a decision-maker?)
- d. How long have you been with your firm? (Confirming that they are a decision-maker.)

Remember — try to limit your conversations to 15 to 20 minutes. This will allow you to network with more people. When ending a conversation, do so gracefully. Honesty is always the best policy. If you are uncomfortable with this, exit like a host by introducing the person to someone else in the room that you know.

9. Write Comments on The Back of Business Cards

When meeting a new prospect or referral source, you want to make a note of the date and the event at which you met on their business card. Also jot down other important information, such as their referral sources, prospects, hobbies, etc. This allows for better organization as well as memory recall.

10. Follow-up With the Relevant People You Have Met

Once you get back to the office, review all the business cards you have collected and discard any unwanted cards. Most importantly, be sure to follow-up with any hot referral sources or prospects within 24 hours. This will show them you care.

I hope you found these ten steps of networking to be helpful. The eleventh step is to implement them at your next networking event. If you do, you will be very pleased with the results you receive.

If you are serious about implementing a business networking system that will help you achieve outstanding results, we suggest that you contact us to discuss how we can help you quickly and easily realize the success you deserve – we offer a free one-hour telephone consultation. Please call (508) 480-0010 or email klister@ParadigmStrategies.com to discuss our services in more detail.

I hope this report has given you some “food for thought”. I appreciate your interest in our work and wish you much success in your future business endeavors.

Best Regards,

Kevin Lister

About The Author



Kevin Lister, founder and president of Paradigm Strategies, the business advising firm to the trades, is a leader in the field of business performance improvement. He possesses nearly 20 years experience in

business management and consulting, effectively operating his own ventures and assisting others with realizing business success.

With an entrepreneurial spirit and a business owner's point of view, Kevin brings hands-on expertise to helping building contractors, sub-contractors, and suppliers. Kevin has deep knowledge and understanding of the trades, based on fifteen years in the construction industry, a family history of owning trades businesses, and a genuine interest and enjoyment in helping blue collar enterprises.

Kevin possesses a Masters of Business Administration (MBA) from Olin Graduate School of Business at Babson College and a Bachelor of Science in marketing from Bentley College. He teaches management and marketing for the University of Phoenix Online.

Kevin is a member of several professional and business organizations, including the Institute of Management Consultants (IMC), the Associated Subcontractors of Massachusetts (ASM), the Builders' Association of Greater Boston (BAGB) and the Boston Chapter of the National Association of the Remodeling Industry (NARI).

Kevin has been awarded the Certified Remodeler Associate (CRA) designation from NARI. He has also been named to the board of directors of the Eastern Massachusetts Chapter of NARI.

About Paradigm Strategies

Paradigm Strategies is one of the country's leading business consulting firms to the construction, automotive and motorcycle industries. Our clients include contractors, sub-contractors, auto repair shops, small auto dealerships, motorcycle repair shops, and motorcycle dealerships, as well as suppliers to these trades.

We are dedicated to helping small to mid-sized companies become more successful by improving sales, cash flow, profitability, productivity and competitiveness. With an understanding that each business is unique, we take an individualized approach when counseling our clients.

To every client relationship, we bring new ways of thinking, new ideas and a straight forward approach that ensure and consistently deliver positive changes and significant results. Based on your needs, business goals and an internal assessment of the issues that are inhibiting growth and success, we develop a customized, strategic program plan that provides you with focus and momentum, and enables you to create the future you envision for your company.