

How to Host
a
Successful
Networking Event



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**Be very clear about your
business goals and how a
Networking Event can help
them.**

With regard to your new event, you must consider the best and worst case scenarios. Doing so will help you to avoid mistakes and mishaps as well as give you confidence as you follow through. Remember, you always want to relay a positive and professional business image to your guests. Your business goals are your foundation and your networking event is merely a marketing tool. Keep this in mind as you go through the entire planning process. If you continue to make

clear connections between your business goals and the various aspects your networking event, you are headed in the right direction for great results. As you go through this process you may have to be increasingly creative and it is suggested that you even collaborate with other minds. Receiving input from colleagues or even those who you target can pay off in the end.

Construct a sensible budget and spend wisely

As with any other business endeavor, a budget is necessary when planning your networking

event. It is recommended to consider all expenses and if a profit is to be made at all. This is just a smart course of action and will help you to plan reasonably and not lose your shirt. Even if you're networking event is not intended to draw a profit, creating a budget is still a good business practice. For example; there may be a cost for the venue, for promotion, for marketing material, etc. Many networking events are intended to attract a target market and later convert those attendees to clients. All of the numbers, including the value of one client, need to be considered in the budgeting process. It doesn't have to take a long time to examine the

details of a good budget however it is an important aspect in the process.

Plan your event well in advance.

Spreading the word for your networking event is of course, extremely important. In order to ensure that you have a great turnout it is recommended that you spread the word over at least a few weeks. This is imperative because it gives your attendees time to plan their schedules and mark their calendars accordingly. As a matter of fact, several weeks may be the

shortest period of time you may want to begin promoting. The best recommendation is 8-12 weeks in advance. However, this time line metric is not cast in stone. If you know that you can absolutely spread the word effectively and the result will be a full house within a few weeks of promotion, go right ahead. It is merely a smart recommendation to be considerate and allow your target attendees every option to free up their schedules. Consequently, this time margin also gives you more time to iron out the details of your event.

Create a list of your desired attendees.

It is a smart practice to create a list of people you would like to attend your networking event. It should be a very detailed list including; prospective clients, partners, and those people you would be in contact with either. This is a wise course of action because it saves you time and pinpoints exactly who you need to be in contact with in order to further your business goals positively. It helps you to avoid a random crowd of individuals who may not be favorable to your professional aspirations. This particular step does not have to be very time-consuming at all. It

simply suggests taking a look at your business and identifying those who could help it grow. There are other businesses and industries that probably work in connection with yours. These are the ones to be considered when creating a good list.

Explore ways to reach those you want in attendance.

If you are targeting a particular group or segment to attend your event, you are on the right track. While many events may be of random attendance, targeted attendees may bring more

powerful results. Even though this is a step in the right direction you'll still need to find where these people are. You will also have to inform them of your networking affair. There are several ways to locate your targeted guests; You can attend other events where they may be and look for online discussion groups. Basic participation in either will put you in touch with those you seek. You can also locate industry or trade websites and advertise your event there. If you choose to advertise in this way, make sure that the website is targeting your particular area and not worldwide unless this is what you want.

Find a location to make the best Impression

Just as a church chapel or a fancy hall is the best place for a wedding, you must apply this thinking to make your networking event a visual success. In the same way that a logo or your physical appearance represents your business image, where you host your event is much the same. Considering your business goals, desired event results, and easy accessibility, begin your search for a suitable event location. If your place of business is a good representation of the products or services you provide, simply host your event there. However, there

are many accessible hotels and restaurants that will give you a great deal in using their facility. Once again, keep the important aspects in mind; image, accessibility, and end result. Your venue's manager or owner should also understand that you are contributing to future clients/customers for them as well. Therefore, a fair deal can be negotiated easily.

Design the activities of your Networking Event.

Every event or function we attend includes some form of activity. A wedding includes a ceremony followed by a reception. An awards ceremony includes an opening ceremony followed by various recognition segments. Besides the activity of business people networking with one another, your event may include a guest speaker, individual business introductions, or even a brief product demonstration. Based on your business goals and your desired results, you must design your event from start to finish with activities that will complement

your aspirations. This is not to suggest blanketing your event with dozens of activities. I'm merely saying to add individual activities that make the event more enjoyable while enhancing your businesses image. Keeping the purpose of the event in mind, there are many ways to accomplish this; door prizes, a notable speaker, and even relevant business announcements.

Thoroughly promote your Networking Event online.

Spreading the word about your networking function requires a special kind of focus and

dedication. Though you may promote through word-of-mouth or even friend to friend, the Internet offers excellent options. There are several ways to take advantage of mass traffic online; Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter , and even YouTube are the main places for online traffic. The above online social networks and are bursting with your target market in some form. Your goal is to locate these people through connecting or "friending" those in your sights. You should create a list with criteria on who you are looking to connect with. Once this is done you can perform a number of searches on each of these sites and locate groups or individuals that fit

your description. As you go through this process you will develop keywords and even be able to use Pay Per Click advertising on these websites as well.

Take the proper advantage of e-mail marketing.

It is no secret that we are now in the age of instant information via electronic mail. Getting the word out about your upcoming networking event through word-of-mouth can

really be enhanced through the proper use of e-mail. Most of us have a small or large list of e-mail contacts but it takes a bit of extra effort to use e-mail when targeting a market. Building up to your event, it is possible to build a targeted list of potential attendees. You can do this by creating a capture page and promoting highly valuable information to your target attendees. Simply locate online discussion groups in your desired category, post comments, leave a link to your capture page, and offer free information in exchange for their e-mail address. Once they become subscribers, you can send periodic e-mails informing and reminding them of your upcoming networking event.

Add value to your Networking Event by offering Door Prizes

Much of the time professionals attend networking events to meet other professionals but if there is greater value added it can increase attendance. By adding giveaways and local deals you are really increasing the perceived value of your event. It is true that you want to attract a specific target and certain giveaways could attract individuals slightly outside of your desired guests. However, if you keep your business goals in mind and match your Door Prizes to something that the individuals invited would want, your outcome

will be closer to what is desired. You will also open up the opportunity for local professionals and businesses, attending or not, to promote themselves through their products or services. Each door prize that you render should be from your business, a local business, or an attending professional. This is a great way to add value to your event and develop potential partners by default.

Make sure your event marketing counts

It is always wise when creating

marketing copy and communications that you relay and emphasize what's important. You want to accurately communicate the finer points of your networking event and let your desired attendees know what to expect. When people have a clear idea on what they are walking into, they will respond accordingly. Your detailed information within your marketing should explain the theme of the event (business networking), why they should attend, and activities that will transpire. As these points are being added to your marketing material and copy, cheap attractiveness and above all, professionalism in mind. Be sure not to over

exaggerate which causes negative word-of-mouth and could put a blemish on your business image. Making it sound provocative simply calls for creativity. Examine the marketing copy of other similar events and build interesting and exciting advertisements from those.

Research other Networking Events in your general area.

It is always good to know what others in your industry are up to. No matter what the goal of your networking event may be, it is good to be in the know regarding your competition. While a

networking event is an excellent idea, it is by no means unique when it comes to marketing practices. In other words, your competition could be hosting networking events for the same purpose. Therefore, it is wise to know about similar events so that you can make adjustments and position yourself to be as unique as possible. You should also examine various local event calendars within your industry to make sure that you don't plan your event on the same night that a popular function is taking place. Doing this will help to increase your attendance and give your desired attendees the luxury of not

having to choose one over the other.

Always Collect Business Cards from your guests

Even if you obtain attendee contact information from online sign-ups or even a sign in sheet at the door, collecting business cards is still an important practice. There are numerous purposes to collecting business cards that can prove useful. For example; they can be used as back up contact information if anything happens to your sign in sheet or registration software data. They can be used, if placed in a bin when of attendees enter your event, to be

pulled out randomly when giving away door prizes. They can be used in obtaining physical addresses or other information not available through online sign-up or sign in sheets. There are even more reasons to collect business cards but the acquisition of them is very easy; simply request attendees hand over their business cards when they first enter your event and are signing in. Most will do so gladly.

Name Tags or Badges Are an Important Element to Include

You must consider that when people come to network they are in a room full of strangers. Networking is a social exercise but it also has an end goal in mind. Many attendees may feel intimidated and uncomfortable while others may be more focused and have a goal of who they want to meet. In either case removing the guesswork and putting a name and a company with a face is valuable to your guests. By using name tags for badges you are helping your attendees to collapse time frames and making it easier for them to interact with one

another. There are even networking events in which the badges are color-coded by industry. This is excellent because it allows more focused networkers to approach who they wish as well as avoid others whom they may feel are not a good match.

You may want to hire a good photographer

If you're planning on hosting a networking event chances are you're not going to stop with just one. As you go through the process of hosting several events it is a good idea to record the happenings via photos or videos.

This is a good idea for a few reasons; you can post these photos or videos on your event website. You can e-mail attendees photos or videos of events they attended and subsequent events. By posting these photos or videos you are displaying visual proof that your events are worthy of attending. Depending on your role in event itself, you may or may not have time to take flicks or film it yourself. Therefore, it is a good idea hire a professional photographer to take photos or record your event activities. Hiring a professional almost guarantees that there **will** be higher quality than doing it yourself.

Many photographers are affordable for short periods of time.

Accept Walk-ins and Door Payments for additional guests

It is always a good idea to have an online registration option. This makes it convenient for guests to sign up but you cannot stop there. Many people who host networking events allow for online sign-up and then have a cut off. When this is done there is no option to attend the event without preregistration online. If you're looking to maximize attendance as well as

your bottom line, you must have a way to accept payments for latecomers who haven't preregistered. You must prepare in and dance to accept cash payments and have change available. Furthermore, you must prepare yourself to accept credit and debit card payments on the spot. An easy way to accept credit card payments is to use a portable card swiper. If you have an iPhone or Android smart phone you can use "Square" which is free and connects right to your headphone jack. No merchant account is required.

Online and Off-Line Registrations are both important

Making it easy for your desired guests to register for your event is imperative. Even though it is very easy to register for events online nowadays, there are many who find online mechanisms complicated or difficult. Because of this, you must create options for registration online and off-line. A great online registration software is Eventbrite.com. This online software is free and relatively easy to set up. If you charge for your event, the company will take a small percentage of each ticket sold. However, you have the

option to completely customize your event page. You can include photos, videos, press, etc. It is very user-friendly.

Simultaneously, must create a way for people to sign up off-line. There are a few options for this; have people come to your place of business to purchase tickets. Allow people to call your business line and purchase tickets via credit or debit over the phone. Partner with a local business and sell tickets from their location.

Using Event Help and Support Staff

Even when hosting small networking events it's not recommended to handle all of the chores alone. These chores can include; checking people in at the door, introducing people to others, handing out your company literature, etc. You will want to make sure that your guests have a pleasant and productive experience. It can get to be cumbersome when trying to handle several tasks at once. The last thing you want is for your guests to feel neglected. You also want to ensure that the activities within your event are fulfilling your goals. If you decide to partner

with another business or professional, you can assign different tasks for both of you to complete. It is also a good practice to trade off on tasks as the event progresses. This way both of you can get a chance to mingle as you wish. There are also the options of hiring event support or enlisting volunteers who may benefit from attending as well.

Adding Music for an Upbeat and Professional Atmosphere

Typically, networking events can go well if they are simply run professionally and the guest's experience is seriously kept in

mind. This is all possible with a stringent organization process. However, because your guest's experience is valuable you can add music to help create a pleasant atmosphere. Remember, this is an event that is designed to help professionals to network as well as give your business exposure. The music that you choose is only to be considered a good backdrop to help facilitate comfort and enjoyment. This is an optional choice but you should make sure that it is not played too loud as to cause people to yell or speak unpleasantly above their natural tones. You should choose instrumental music that is of a medium tempo and similar to that

which is played for relaxation purposes. You can also choose more upbeat and motivating music just keep the desired mood generation in mind.

Making Negotiations with Venues

Depending on the location that you decide on to host your networking event, there is no doubt that there will be some form of negotiation at hand. Many places like; hotel conference rooms, catering halls, and other locations focused around events, will have set prices which are usually nonnegotiable. However,

if you choose to hold your event at a restaurant, pub, or other public business looking for exposure, you can negotiate terms and pricing. For example; if you choose to host your event at a fancy restaurant or popular pub on a slow evening, the manager or owner may allow you to do so free of charge. This is because you are indirectly promoting their place of business to people who otherwise wouldn't be aware of them. Therefore, you can use this aspect of value when negotiating a price or extras during the event; like refreshments. You can let the venue know that you will promote their specials in return for free space rental and a reduced charge on refreshments.

Create an Event Website or Blog to Maximize Exposure

Even if your company has its own website and contains information about your event, creating a separate website or blog about the event isn't a bad idea. You can always exchange links from your company's website to your event website and vice versa. A separate website or blog aside from your main one may help to attract targeted visitors if optimized correctly. You may also put your event in a position to take on a life of its own by allowing visitors to comment about the event and their experiences. They can also contribute questions or compliments publicly. Depending on your web designer's

know-how or your own expertise, you can add an option to sign up right on the site. Having a separate site will also build your overall online equity and show that your company receives positive feedback in other areas like networking events. It can also help with attendance because it keeps visitor's attention on the event and signing up opposed to providing distractions.

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Sincerely,

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