



## NETWORKING

Networking organizations can generate leads and provide insight into the business dynamics of your community. It is recommended that franchisees attend a few different organizations as visitors before deciding which organization to join. We recommended talking to other members to determine which organization is the strongest in the community. The fees for these organizations generally are recovered quickly from the leads generated. Select an organization in which you feel comfortable and will provide the most referrals for your type of services.

### Local Networking Organizations and Ideas for Community Involvement

Join a local organization such as:

- Chamber of Commerce
  - [www.chamberofcommerce.com](http://www.chamberofcommerce.com)
  - For more information, there is a document in the Marketing section of the Fishing Hole
- Circle of Influence
  - For more information, there is a document in the Marketing section of the Fishing Hole
- Business Expos & Trade Shows
  - For more information, there is a document in the Marketing section of the Fishing Hole
  - Banner stand available for rent through FISH Distribution Center
  - Promotional giveaways
  - Printable Cards in Fishing Hole
    - *Networking - EnterToWin Customizable Cards (4 on 1)*
- Better Business Bureau (BBB)
  - [www.bbb.org](http://www.bbb.org)
- Business Network International (BNI)
  - [www.bni.com](http://www.bni.com)
- Rotary Clubs
  - [www.rotary.org](http://www.rotary.org)
- Sponsorship of local events



- Donations to auctions
  - Gift baskets
  - Gift certificates

There are several benefits of becoming a member of local organizations in your community. Most of these groups have business referral programs where the members refer your business to their circle of influence. Being a member also gives you credibility within your community. For example, independent window cleaners are unlikely to be members of the Chamber of Commerce.

Many of these organizations may have a small upfront cost to join. This price may range from \$100 to \$300 per year for dues. Leads generated by such organizations include business referrals, ribbon cutting ceremonies, requests for residential and commercial bids from members and their friends, and constant exposure at any gathering (make sure you wear FISH gear and bring business cards and brochures).

## The Keys to Successful Networking

Every top salesperson will agree that networking is a key activity to **obtaining more and quality prospects**. If you attend events simply for a free cocktail and some munchies convinced that you are “networking”, you are totally missing out. Here are a few things to remember to make the most out of the groups with which you are affiliated:

- **Give more than you take.** Find opportunities to learn about the business and personal interests of the other members with the goal to help them out with information and leads. Ask curious questions of others and don’t be so quick to blurt out your elevator speech. People love to talk about themselves, and these interactions form a firm foundation for long-term relationships. Be sure to follow up with a quick note or LinkedIn invitation. Also, volunteer on committees or speak on your area of expertise. In helping others, you will find that what goes around comes around.
- **Take advantage of learning opportunities.** Professional and industry groups offer webinars and seminars to educate members on trends and focus topics. Being a trusted advisor to your customers requires you stay on top of industry developments. While at GE Healthcare Financial Services, I joined the Healthcare Financial Management Association and attended conferences targeted at my prospect base of hospital CFOs. Not only were these great networking opportunities, but I learned much about what kept my clients up at night and how to address it. The even better news is that I never saw my competitors at these events!
- **Choose groups that are fun!** Scott McNealy, former head of Sun Microsystems, used to say that if you’re not having fun at work, you should be doing something else. This is an opportunity to expand your visibility, gain useful contacts *and* enjoy social programs. There are groups like the



Executive Women's Golf Association that are completely based on a fun and engaging sport or hobby. So why not totally enjoy yourself while you are building up your referral base?

Networking groups can be a fabulous source of increased sales. According to Dan Powers, owner of Sound + Vision video production, a whopping 70% of his business comes from his San Jose Chamber of Commerce contacts and volunteering as Ambassador for new members. Like any activity, you'll get out of it what you put into it. Happy Selling!

## **The Ten Commandments of Networking**

Networking is a lot of fun! Business networking is when a group of like-minded businesspeople gather and help each other. If you check, you will surely find a networking group in your area. The networking group can meet as often as they wish, as is convenient for the participants.

Regrettably, most people start with a networking group by looking for immediate gains.... that is, for favorable results for themselves. If this is what you are trying to achieve, you are networking for the wrong reasons and will be sticking out like a sore thumb.

Many people think that the size of a networking group makes the difference in networking. When groups start falling in size, members will say, "We have to build up our numbers." Now, what numbers are they referring to? Is it the number of participants? I would rather belong to a networking group of two people who can help each other on a regular basis than have a large group of business people not following the Ten Commandments of Networking. It is not the quantity; it is the quality.

"I haven't got any leads yet!" Have you given one ever? Or have you suggested might help a fellow member? Did you call anyone with a compliment and say, "Just wanted you to know, Jim, that your comment on the XYZ expansion was right on the money." One must be willing to put in time waiting also. It might take a while before people feel comfortable with offering you a referral.

Networking groups will come and go. To get the most out of your networking experience, you need to build a relationship with people who you want to have contact with. Not all members will be able to help you, nor will you be able to help them. That doesn't mean you should snub them! I still have strong relationships with my networking friends from groups that are long gone.

When networking, spend most of your time and effort on people who can help each other out for the long term. That is right. This is a long-term project. Countless times I have been to business networking events and have seen people run from person to person, with the expectations of first giving away their business card and hoping to gather the other person's. How can you possibly build a relationship with a person when your objective is to get out there, and collect cards? Some networking groups make a game out of it to see who can collect the most in a certain time. What a waste of business cards!

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You will find that a highly effective networker will "work the net". What I mean is that they will go into a function with a goal in mind. My usual goal when business networking is to have the expectation that I will "meet" and "understand" only three people per event. I know what kind of person that I can help and expect that this person will be able to do the same for me. A win/win situation is what I am talking about. The highly effective networker will take the time to cultivate a rapport.

After the business networking event is when the real work begins. After all, you are only at the networking event to meet and build rapport. Follow up A.S.A.P! Now is the time to send a nice, customized card and call a few days after to arrange a time to meet for a coffee or to have lunch. That is when you can listen to the details of what your new "friend" requires. You might even have the chance to offer your goods and services, only after listening.

If you want to gain the most out of business networking, follow the Ten Commandments of Networking!

- 1) Thou shalt drop the "What is in it for me?" attitude.
- 2) Thou shalt listen.
- 3) Thou shalt build a relationship.
- 4) Thou shalt give the first referral.
- 5) Thou shalt not tell others of the referral you require; thou shalt "show them" with a story.
- 6) Thou shalt be specific of the type of referral.
- 7) Thou shalt reciprocate when appropriate.
- 8) Thou shalt participate in the network executive, functions, and network time.
- 9) Thou shalt thank the person who gave a referral.
- 10) Thou shalt follow up on the referral within 24 hours.

Business networking is productive and fun, and that is why it will always be part of the Bigger Picture.

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