

A close-up photograph of three business professionals in a meeting. A woman on the left is smiling and looking towards the camera. A man in the center is looking down at a document. A woman on the right is also looking down at the document. They are all dressed in professional attire.

THE CONNECTED CLUB

TOP NETWORKING TIPS

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Introduction

By The Connected Club

Many businesses see networking as an integral part of their sales approach and we agree, but which events do you choose? There are free events, monthly events, evening events and many more. There is no secret formula, however over the next several pages, we are going to share with you, a few tips to ensure you get the best from your time networking. We will look at strategies, how to make the most of a networking event, how to prepare and then follow up after the event.

Authors Richard Pond and David Bell of The Connected Club have been involved in running networking events for over a decade and are perfectly placed to give you their advice to ensure that you maximise your time when choosing and attending networking events.

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Strategy

By The Connected Club

Whatever you do in business it's always best to have a strategy and this certainly applies to business networking. Every business is different, so every strategy needs to be tailored for you and your business. Your strategy should include preparation, research, a way of communicating with your new found connections, a clear plan on measuring the events you attend and most importantly a clear way of measuring which events work for.

Remember networking is about building relationships, not a quick fix way to sell. It is amazing how many people just attend networking events without a plan. Hopefully, if you follow the points below, it will help you identify your best strategy.

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Do your research

By The Connected Club

You wouldn't turn up to a business meeting without researching the company and the same applies to networking. Try to obtain a delegate list in advance, see who is there and if possible engage on social media, letting people know you will be joining the group. Bring plenty of business cards and check if the group supplies name badges, if not bring one with you.

Most networking groups supply lanyards or badges, which can hold your business card. If you attend a number of regular groups it is worth investing in a name badge that has your name and company in large letters. The bigger your name the more chance your fellow networkers will remember your name.

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Be early

By The Connected Club

Turning up late to a networking event, especially if you are new to the group makes it harder to join the conversation. What impression does it give if you are late arriving at a meeting to win new potential clients? If you are early people will naturally gravitate to you and you will become the focus point. People often ask us about how is the best way to break into the circle, in other words how is the best way to join a conversation that is in full flow.

If you arrive at a networking event, then you are the circle. By arriving early you will meet more people, than if you arrive late. This seems obvious, but you will be amazed how many people arrive late to networking events and then complain that they haven't made many connections.

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The handshake

By The Connected Club

When attending networking events or any business meeting you want to make sure you give a good first impression. You want to be dressed the part and equally importantly you want your first interaction to be memorable. So make sure you smile and introduce yourself and give a firm but not too firm handshake. We would always suggest a handshake when first meeting someone.

In some cases, you may opt for a kiss if you know the person but under no circumstances go in for a fist pump or high five. (save those for your friends or the sports field) Just remember it doesn't matter how shiny your shoes are or how flashy your business cards have turned out, a limp handshake will leave the recipient with the wrong lasting impression.

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Listen

By The Connected Club

It might be hard to read but in all honesty, people don't really care about you or your business. People care about themselves. Networking is about building relationships and forging new connections, by listening and taking an interest you will do a number of things. Firstly you will be seen as a good listener that is interested in what the other person has to say, you will also get the opportunity to find out if they have any business needs that you or someone that you know can help with. There is an old saying that says the "the best salespeople sell with their ears."

When it is your turn to talk, win people over with your enthusiasm for your product or service. Leave a lasting impression by telling a story about why you were inspired to create your company. Talking about what you enjoy is often contagious, too. When you get other people to share their passion, it creates a memorable two-way conversation.

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Build relationships

By The Connected Club

Relationship building in business is key, we are sure you have seen people at networking events running around handing out business cards like it is their last day on Earth. This does not work, we believe that patience is key when it comes to meeting people at events.

Would you buy or swap your suppliers if you didn't know anything about them or had just met them? No I didn't think so, so why would they? Listen to them, find out about their business and see what areas you can add value to their business.

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Business cards

By The Connected Club

Having a business card is essential if you are planning on attending networking events. You need to make sure your cards leave a good impression long after you leave the event. Just because you have cards don't be fooled into thinking you need to use every last card in your pocket. It's one of the most off-putting things at an event when you see someone running around giving out cards like they are going out of fashion. Be selective and only give out your card at the right moment.

There are a few things you need on your business card. You will need your name, company, contact number and an email address. These are generally classed as the essentials. Some people also opt to have a website address, postal address, mobile number and in some cases a photo. Make sure your cards are printed on a nice thick paper stock and avoid going for stock images, you don't want to end up with an identical card to another business in the room.

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Try other events

By The Connected Club

There are many different networking groups. You have groups that meet weekly, monthly or less frequent. You have large groups and smaller groups, smaller groups are generally members groups. Members groups usually allow you to introduce yourself and your business at each event. You have groups that pass referrals and encourage members to help grow each other's businesses. There are no right or wrong types of networking as each one works better for different people.

The key is to find the one that works for you and stick to it, networking takes time but can be very rewarding if done properly. Remember networking comes in both online and offline formats. For example, online includes social media platforms such as LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook. Which ever networking group you decide to attend, give the event time and don't just go once and move on.

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Measure

By The Connected Club

In business, we try to measure most things including sales, finance, HR and marketing. It is pretty unusual for companies not to have tools like Google Analytics to measure website traffic, or an accounting system to measure financial performance. When it comes to networking we are generally fairly poor at measuring the success of each group. As mentioned in the previous tips networking isn't a quick fix and you need time to forge these great new business relationships. If you measure each meeting, you can look back after a few months and reflect on what groups have been successful.

When we say successful that doesn't always mean work that we have won, it simply means the groups and events that have given you the extra connections for you to build on. By creating a simple spreadsheet you can record and measure all activity which will save you time in the future when working out what came from where.

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Follow up

By The Connected Club

It is so important to follow up and to follow up quickly. Most businesses and business individuals have a LinkedIn account or at least an email address. Collect your cards, write notes on the back and when you get back to the office send them an email or social media message like: “great to meet you today I found it interesting what you were saying on such and such”. Not “here is my price list please place an order”. If you don’t follow up and have not forged a business relationship, yet the chances are when you see them again they are going to be less inclined to discuss that all important business matter.

Try and be personal, if the person that you meet discussed they were going away for the weekend or they had an important family event, then lead with that. By using LinkedIn rather than email your new connection will see your picture and hopefully remember you. If you add that personal note as well your chances of a successful reply is much greater than that of a standard email.

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SUMMARY

In summary

By The Connected Club

To summarise, networking can be one of the greatest ways to grow your business if done right, with thought and planning. We have highlighted in this document a number of ways to help you. We urge you to start with a thought out strategy, research the groups in your area and what happens at these events. Once you have chosen your preferred group then get there early, have a firm handshake, listen to what the other delegates have to say and start to build some great relationships.

You can then use your winning business cards to try many other events and last of all make sure you measure everything and follow up. We hope you have found these tips useful we both hope to see you at event soon.

Dave and Rich
The Connected Club



THE CONNECTED CLUB

TOP NETWORKING TIPS