



Make the Most of your Networking after the Event

By Kristen Luke
September 8, 2009

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Networking is good for almost any business. For advisors, this means attending networking events. Yet many struggle with these events, for a number of reasons. It's uncomfortable to attend an event alone. It's intimidating to strike up a conversation with a stranger. It's difficult to decide if it is more effective to speak to as many people as possible and gather cards or to have in-depth conversations with just a few people.

For those reasons and many others, attending a networking event is an uncomfortable experience for many advisors.

Even if you overcome those hurdles and feel like an event has been a success, you still have to follow up and continue to build relationships with the people you meet. The standard practice for most advisors is to send an email, make a phone call or mail a handwritten note.

But what happens after the initial contact? Is there a system in place to continue following-up in the coming weeks, months and years, even if there is not an immediate fit?

This is where most advisors fail in their networking strategy. If there is not an immediate opportunity to do business, they often let the relationship lapse due to time or resource constraints. By allowing this to happen, a perfectly good networking contact that may have lead to future business has been wasted.

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To make the most of your networking after the event, you need develop a strategy that keeps your name top-of-mind with all of your networking contacts without adding too much additional work on your end. LinkedIn and e-newsletters are two strategies that achieve this goal.

LinkedIn

LinkedIn is an easy way to stay in touch with your contacts. After every networking event, you should cross reference the business cards you collected with people on LinkedIn and send invitations to connect. This can also substitute for a follow up email as long as you include a personal note along with the invitation.

For example:

John,

It was a pleasure meeting you yesterday at the Chamber of Commerce mixer. I look forward to seeing you again at a future event. In the meantime, I'd like to add you to my professional network on LinkedIn.

*Best regards,
Kristen*

This strategy works well because it allows you to connect with everyone you meet, even if there isn't an obvious opportunity to do business at the time. By using LinkedIn, you can follow up with everyone but spend more time reaching out to the more promising contacts through written notes or phone calls.

If you are effectively using LinkedIn by regularly updating your status, updating your profile, connecting with new contacts, participating in groups and utilizing applications, your name will appear on your contacts' LinkedIn home page, keeping your name top-of-mind.

For example, I was as at barbeque recently for a club where I am a member and I ran into someone I hadn't seen in several months. He asked me how I was doing, but then corrected himself by saying, "I feel like I already know how you are doing since I see all of your updates on LinkedIn." By connecting with all of your networking contacts on LinkedIn, you will be able to stay top-of-mind as well as remind them about the work you are doing. It may take months or years to cultivate a relationship this way, but it is better than letting the relationship fall into the abyss.

E-newsletters



Not everyone has a LinkedIn account (though it is rare for networkers these days), so it makes sense to have another way to stay top-of-mind with your contacts. E-newsletters are an effective way to do this.

But be careful! Most people will not be interested in receiving emails about your business. You should create a newsletter that adds value for your contacts. If you only network with a specific group, such as small business owners, you may want to create a newsletter that features a variety of resources specific to this group. It is critical to send a newsletter that people are excited to receive.

I promise you that a newsletter filled with financial planning articles promoting your business will not be well-received by people you met once at a networking event.

Another example is to create a networking newsletter. This is something I do for my own business. Since most of the people I meet at networking events are interested in attending other events, I send a listing twice a month of upcoming events in the area. It is a valuable resource for my contacts. When I'm at events, I use it as a talking point. Inevitably the topic of which events are the best to attend comes up and I slip in that I email a semi-monthly networking newsletter and ask if they would like to be added to the list. They almost always agree and I avoid spamming them with information they don't want. This is very effective for staying top-of-mind with everyone I meet. I encourage you to implement this idea for your own business.

If you decide to create an E-newsletter for your networking contacts, don't turn it into an advertisement for your business. Include your contact information, but remember that you are building a relationship by being a resource. It will be more successful in the long run than trying to aggressively market your business.

These are just two ways you can make the most out of your networking after the event. However you decide to stay in contact, remember that relationships take time to build and if you attend events, you should stay in contact with as many people you meet as possible. Even if you are awkward at networking events, strategies like the ones mentioned will help make your networking efforts more effective.

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