



Networking 101

Why Network

Where to Network

How to Network

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As the Marketing Director at Tarkenton Companies, Will serves the needs of small business owners and entrepreneurs through several subsidiaries. These various channels offer everything from educational, consulting, and coaching services to software. Will loves what he does. He learns about his customers' problems and finds ways to solve them. He listens to customers, brings new products and services to market, develops and manages strategic partner relationships, establishes sales and distribution channels, and manages revenue producing initiatives.



Why Network

When the subject of “networking” comes up, you may cringe. You might believe the whole notion of “networking” is reserved for those cheesy sales types we all love and adore. Some people think networking means getting dressed-up, visiting a large room full of people, dishing out as many business cards as possible, and promising to do lunch. Who wouldn't cringe at the thought of that?

Networking isn't about that; it's about getting to know people and building relationships. Done correctly, networking is the least expensive and most effective way to market your business. Its power and influence can often be the catalyst for business growth and profitability. But we are not all in the same situation. So let's address a few common questions and concerns you may have:

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I'm a new start-up without much to offer.
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Typically, the more you have to offer, the more likely others will be interested in meeting and working with you. In many networking environments, start-ups or relatively unknown businesses are viewed with skepticism and may even raise a few eyebrows. They don't yet have the credibility or track record of success. But just remember: that's the exact reason you're there—to build that credibility and improve your chances of success. If you are not working with someone already, the best way to get to know them is through networking.



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I don't have the time to go to meetings.
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Some people don't think they have enough time to regularly attend networking events. You might be thinking that right now! Well, think about the alternatives. You can stop reading this business guide, pick up the phone, and start cold-calling. Or how about reaching into your desk drawer and retrieving your checkbook to purchase more advertising? If you're committed to growing your business, there are no silver bullets; you must use your time efficiently, meet more people, and build more relationships.

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In the context of business, consider the financial benefits associated with networking. As you're well aware, in any business there are both "hard" and "soft" money costs to weigh. "Hard money" is what we all think of first—cash, credit cards, checks, and the like. But "soft money" is just as important. That's your time and sweat, the time you invest in building your products, services, and business.

For most business owners, "soft money" investments are neither easily calculated nor clearly defined in a ledger. However, if you were to add up your "soft money" investments of labor, networking, connecting, and building relationships, you may be surprised at the financial value you've delivered to your business.



What financial value does it help create?

- For New Customers
 - Additional Sales
 - Larger Average Transaction Amounts
 - More Qualified Referrals
- For Returning Customers
 - Elevated Customer Loyalty
 - Positive Community Recognition
 - Perceived Value

Where to Network

There are numerous networking venues and activities that you can participate in, but it's not always clear which ones are truly beneficial for your business. And it can be difficult to figure out how much time you should devote to networking to maximize its effectiveness.

Face-to-Face Networking

Let's first consider face-to-face networking business organizations. These types of networking venues are typically a good fit for local, non-scalable businesses. Depending on your time constraints, select at least two or three groups for participation.



When you participate in these groups, make sure to actually network! Don't waste your time talking with friends or picking through the tray of hors d'oeuvres. Go out of your way to get know someone. Those who are afraid to meet others are generally those who bounce from group to group without any real success. If you want to build your business through networking, you must "work" the groups you join.

Casual Business Groups

This type of business group accepts many people from various professions with no restrictions on the number of people represented in any industry. These groups usually host two types of monthly meetings: mixers and presentations. Mixers are held to allow everyone to mingle informally while other meetings are centered around presentations by guest speakers on important business topics.

The best examples of these networks are the thousands of Chamber of Commerce groups. These groups offer you the opportunity to make connections with a wide group of entrepreneurs in your area, helping you develop a word-of-mouth-based business.

Find Your Local Chamber of Commerce [here](#).



Strong Business Groups

Strong business groups typically meet weekly for the primary purpose of exchanging referrals. The membership requirements are often restrictive, accepting only one person per profession. The meetings are typically very structured and focused on the primary purpose of the group: networking and exchanging referrals. These types of groups will demand a strong participatory commitment from their membership.

The best example of this type of networking group is BNI. This type of group offers a well structured environment in which members are held accountable for producing and exchanging referrals. In this setting, the best rule-of-thumb is to give before you take. To get referrals, you will need to give referrals.

Find Your Local BNI Chapter [here](#).

Community Service Clubs

These types of groups give you an opportunity to give back to the community where you do business while making great contacts and receiving positive press. These community groups provide a great platform for developing word-of-mouth business.



The best examples of these groups include Rotary, Lions, and Kiwanis Clubs. These community groups have a primary objective of giving back to the community, but, as a byproduct, help foster long-term friendships, which are so important in building a word-of-mouth-based business.

- Find Your Local Rotary Club [here](#).
- Find Your Local Lions Club [here](#).
- Find Your Local Kiwanis Club [here](#).

Professional Associations

Professional associations are typically assembled with members from one specific industry. The primary objective of professional associations is for members to share information, ideas, and overall knowledge as it relates to their industry.

Below is a list of some more notable professional associations, but there are countless others. Your objective is to join associations where your potential clients or target markets are members.

For example, if your best clients are CPAs, ask them which groups they belong to. This will give you a list of groups from which you can choose to join, attend, and/or follow. Keep in mind that you may have to join as an affiliate or through an associate membership if you do not meet the association's membership requirements.



- Find Your Local AICPA Chapter [here](#).
- Find Your Local Restaurant Association [here](#).
- Find Your Local SHRM Chapter [here](#).
- Find Your Local RMA Chapter [here](#).

Social/Business Groups

Similar to community service clubs, these types of groups give you an opportunity to give back to the community where you do business while making great contacts along the way. Again, this type of group will assist you in developing a great word-of-mouth business.

One such example is Jaycee. This organization caters to a younger membership (ages 18 to 40). The benefit of joining this kind of group is to meet new people, become involved in your community, and make new connections.

Find Your Local Jaycee Chapter [here](#).

Women's Business Organizations

Women's business organizations are diverse in structure and scope. The common thread is that they tend to focus on education, professional development, and networking.



The best examples of these groups include the National Association of Women Business Owners (NAWBO) and the American Business Women's Association (ABWA). These groups are all-inclusive with the goal to help members grow through leadership, education, and networking.

- Find Your Local NAWBO Chapter [here](#).
- Find Your Local ABWA Chapter [here](#).

Internet Networking

While face-to-face networking is a powerful way to grow your business, it's also clear that LinkedIn and other internet networking sites have become an important networking tool, especially for small businesses.

On the internet side of networking, LinkedIn is by far one of the most useful networking tools available. It allows users to connect with influencers and key decision makers to build a power network of individuals who can be potential clients or help with word-of-mouth advertising.

To get the most out of your LinkedIn profile, consider these important tips.



Internet Networking – LinkedIn

Optimized Profile: Update your profile picture with a current photo, add experiences, skills, and work experiences, both current and past. The more complete and “active” your profile is, the better your ranking will be when people are searching for someone like you.

Your Brand Headline: A headline that communicates who you are, who you help, and how you help is often what grabs a person's attention when searching the site. Be clear and compelling.

Join Groups: Just like face-to-face networking, this can be one of the most effective ways to connect with professionals who are serious about networking, sharing referrals, and building business relationships.

Create a Group: If you have specific industry or profession expertise, create a group showcasing your expertise. This will build your credibility and allows you to connect with those who are either influential in your market or those who are seeking more knowledge in your industry.

Personal Invites: Don't use the generic, preformatted invitation to connect! Create and send a personal invitation. Remember, the invite is your first communication on LinkedIn, so make a good first impression.



Endorsements & Recommendations: This can help enhance your profile, but don't get lazy with this one! Don't send a mass or generic email to your contacts asking for endorsements. Be strategic. Contact those people who have a great professional connection to you and/or your business, asking them for a quick recommendation for you based on a specific connection, event, or story.

Join LinkedIn [here](#).

So, which groups should you join?

As with any investment, don't put all your eggs in one basket; diversify your activities. One type of business group won't meet all of your needs.

Carefully select a well-rounded assortment of organizations, each different than the others. Talk to your partners or employees, asking them for help in deciding which groups to join and why.

Networking can offer a huge upside to your business, but only if you remain diligent and committed to your networking efforts.

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“A headline that communicates who you are, who you help, and how you help, is often what grabs a person's attention when searching the site.”

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How to Network

Have you ever been on a blind date before? Well, going to a networking event can feel the same way. You're a little nervous and second guessing yourself. You're just hoping to get out of there without making a fool of yourself. And if you're lucky enough, you might end up with his/her phone number and a second date.

To help alleviate the stress that may occur at that moment, we've created a simple punch-list for you to follow. To make it even simpler, we've broken it down into three categories: Entering the Room, Starting Conversations, and Follow-Up. Settle down and follow these simple steps.

Entering the Room

Be Early. As one of the first attendees, you're able to gradually warm-up. The meeting place is calmer and less noisy, allowing you to carefully assess your surroundings. Best of all, groups will not have been formed and other attendees won't be fully engaged in conversations. This allows you to easily find people to start speaking with, forming your own conversation group.



Repeat Names. When someone introduces themselves, repeat their name (mentally) several times. Here's the hard part: try remembering their names throughout the event. This will prove to be very beneficial when you're ready to introduce them to another attendee, continue a conversation, or tell them goodbye. It's very powerful and, most importantly, memorable when you say that person's name back to them.

Hold the Business Cards. Refrain from handing out business cards prematurely. Wait until someone asks for them or when you're asking for someone to contact you. Never introduce yourself with a business card. People don't like to be dealt cards; you're not a card dealer and they're not playing poker.

Eye Contact. Always look everyone in the eye during an introduction and when speaking. Look away the instant it's no longer comfortable. If not, you're going to be that "creepy guy."

Hand Shaking. Shake hands during introductions. However, if you're being introduced to a large group, you'll want to shake the hands of the first few people and then give a healthy nod to the rest. For those that have experienced it before, you know that shaking hands can get a little overboard and start to get a little awkward for everyone. So shake a few hands and nod to the rest.



Relax. The sun will rise tomorrow. Before you enter the event, take one minute to relax, meditate, or say a prayer. Take slow and measured deep breaths. This brief relaxation period will help you communicate more clearly.

All of that and you haven't even sat down or had your first conversation yet!

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Starting Conversations

Smile. Yep. It’s really that simple. Your tone and expressions will be more inviting and cheerful when you’re smiling. Remember to keep it genuine. This may sound a little corny but think happy thoughts before you enter a room or when you start your next conversation.

Be Pleasant. If it’s bitterly cold outside, don’t talk about it. If your dog just died, don’t talk about it. You want to focus on things that are enjoyable, positive, and uplifting.

Be You. This is worth repeating. Remember, you’re at the event to get to know people and build relationships. Don’t overdo it. Fake laughs, a lot of back slapping and an ear-to-ear grin won’t get you too far. Just be you.



Simple Questions. Don't be that weird guy leering at other people from the darkest corner of the room. Engage others in conversation with easy-to-answer questions. For example, "May I join you?" If you're not comfortable leading a conversation and you're a much better listener, ask a question that prompts something different than a "yes" or "no" response. For example, "What brings you to this event?" Let the other person respond while you listen and you'll know where to take the conversation next.

No Selling. Let's face it: no one likes to be sold. Show more interest in others than yourself. Be curious. Ask questions and listen. If someone does ask about you and/or your products or services, respond with a simple description of who you are, what you do, who you help, and what problems you (or your products/services) help solve. Don't fixate on yourself. Make your point and move on.

Be Appreciative. Start and finish each conversation with a compliment that expresses appreciation. As you're listening, what have you heard that you really value? For example, "I really enjoyed getting to know how much you care about your customers." Remember this as you talk, too, and listen for an opportunity to share it.



Show Passion. Do you love what you do? If so, don't be afraid to put that love on display. Now this is very different than being "in-love" with yourself or "selling" what you do. This is about being excited about what you do. If you're not excited and passionate about what you do, then how will others respond? In conversation, show your enthusiasm for what you do. Respond with inspiring stories and examples that will energize the conversation.

Don't Dominate. Be curious. Ask questions and then shut up. You want to make other people feel valued and important. Be a conversationalist, not a talker. When speaking, limit your responses to 30 seconds or less. If you're trying to convey something very important, break it down into smaller points of emphasis, pause to ensure the person understood, and then continue.

Follow-Up

Just Started. Networking is just the start of a conversation. If you've had a great conversation with someone, ask them the best way to reconnect. This is important, as some people have strong communication preferences. Some people like email or phone; others prefer social networks like LinkedIn. Always try responding through their preferred communication channel.



48 Hours. Whatever mode of communication your conversation partner prefers; contact them within 48 hours of the event. When sending your message, reference something you discussed at the event. This will help jog their memory of who you are and what was discussed.

Continuation. Continue to follow-up with your prospects. Studies have shown that it can take up to nine points of contact before a prospect is ready to become a customer or referral partner. Relationships take time to grow.



Does your business
need more
Networking help?

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