

Networking done right, produces results

Campbell River Mirror -



Networking produces results. The more people know about you and your business, and the more they trust you, the greater the likelihood they will either work with you or refer someone else to you. A recent trend has capitalized on the ‘speed dating phenomenon’ through ‘speed networking’ promoted as a chance to meet new contacts for 30 seconds and then move on to the next person. But the problem with that approach is that meaningful relationships can only happen over time and it takes a commitment to get to the point where you have developed a level of trust in the person and the business. It’s as true today as it has ever been, people want to do business with those they know and trust.

The good news is that networking is an invaluable tool that anyone in the business world can utilize and when done right, effective networking can be a small business owner’s best form of marketing. The purpose of networking varies based on one’s own agenda, but the primary focus is to meet people, and have people meet you and to build relationships. It’s not a license to sell yourself and it’s not a contest to see how many business cards you can collect. They work best as opportunities for people to know you and your company and refer to you, and for you in turn to do the same for them. Personal referrals and word of mouth advertising is invaluable and still some of the most highly effective business tools.

In Campbell River, there are many opportunities to network through associations like the BNI, BPWN and Rotary to name a few. And, for the business owner and local businesses who rely on marketing their business and growing their contact list and database, the Chamber in particular offers a significant number of purposeful monthly networking opportunities. But no matter what organizations you choose to join, they will only be as effective as the level you get involved and then use them to achieve your business objectives.

To make the most of your next networking events I’ve captured some of the best practices that I’ve experienced and some of the pitfalls to stay away from.

Right from the beginning, it's important to choose the right networking group or event. Choose those events that your potential clients, customers, business mentors, donors and supporters would attend. The best approach is to have a goal to make between two and five new quality contacts at each networking event. Most of us have experienced the person who, while talking to you, keeps their eyes roving around the room, seeking their next contact. This individual is more interested in passing out and collecting business cards than establishing a quality relationship. Conversely, the quality connections you want to make are those that will enable people to get to know you better and become much more trusting of you and your business.

But in seeking those quality contacts, you have exactly one opportunity to make a great first impression. It's factors like your handshake, eye contact and facial expressions that influence that initial impact but most importantly it's your ability to be attentive and show interest in the other person and what they have to say that will make the best first impression. One of the ways you can do this is by asking the people you meet what they do before talking about yourself or your business. And as basic as it can get, I'm still surprised at how many times I've attended networking events and met people who either forgot to bring their business cards or ask to use one of yours to write their contact information. It's probably not the best way to make a first impression and a real missed opportunity to connect the business and organization brand with the person.

We've all heard about the elevator speech and the idea that you should also be able to clearly state what you do and how you help meet your clients and customers needs in the time it takes to ride up an elevator with someone. And that's important from the sense that you need to be able to capture someone's interest and share your story in under a minute.

Where many people drop the ball is that even though they've met a few great contacts, they don't follow up after the event. The follow up is the most important aspect of networking. The next day contact that mentions something from a conversation and expresses an interest to keep in contact is a great practice. And follow that up with a offer to meet for coffee and learn more about their business will help the relationship evolve. Remember it's not a sales call, it's about building a relationship and trust.

To comment on this article or for further information about the Chamber in Campbell River, please email colleen.evans@campbellriverchamber.ca