

10 Steps to Successful Networking

1. **Network in places and at events that would attract your target audience.** Don't choose venues and occasions where just your good friends hang out. Your friends may not have anything to do with furthering your business goals.
2. **Sharpen your networking skills before attending an event.** Have a few topics in mind to use as icebreakers. Ask open-ended questions to keep conversation flowing.
3. **Set specific goals and stick to them.** If your objective is to meet three (3) new people at a local chat-and-chew, make it a point to do that before you leave.
NOTE: Try not to spend more than 10 minutes with one person... if you find yourself in this position, politely introduce that person to someone else, and move on.
4. **Describe your business in 60 seconds or less.** No one wants to hear you ramble about every aspect of your company. Create a concise and interesting way to let others know what you do.
5. **Be willing to listen.** Business owners often make the mistake of talking too much when attending a networking event. Ask questions of the person you're talking to and give your undivided attention. Don't glance down at your watch too often or let your eyes wander over their shoulder.
6. **Relax.** When networking, don't whip out your business card seconds after you shake the person's hand. Create interesting dialogue first. That will begin the relationship-building process.
7. **Take notes.** Whether you attend a conference, organization meeting, or chamber event, gather information about potential clients and write it on the backs of their business cards. This will help you recall your conversations when it's time to follow up.
8. **Look for people to refer.** Sometimes the fastest way to get referrals is to give referrals, so pull your entrepreneurial peers into your discussions.
9. **Follow up.** After the event, don't throw all of the business cards you collected into a drawer. Follow up with a phone call, fax, letter, or e-mail. Or suggest a lunch meeting.
10. **Be patient.** Obtaining new clients through networking doesn't happen overnight, but it does happen. Stay focused, maintain contact with potential clients, and never give up.