

## Is there rhyme or reason to your networking behavior?

BY Harriet Kative Lerner

Believe it or not, you need a filing system or an Excel sheet for your live networking. Even though we are all mesmerized by social networking, it is still the live networking that we must continue pursuing if we want leads and referrals. Due to the fact that so many people are roaming around looking to make contacts that might lead to a job, or that others are roaming around looking for new business in a not yet resuscitated economy, it is necessary to decide on the category of networking group you should be attending. Here's how you can break it down and then choose where you'll go. Oh by the way, if you are going to everything, that is "overkill" and you might lose the focus it takes to make a real contact.

1. Large business organizations, such as Chambers of Commerce with many offerings where you pay annually to be a member, and then pay slightly less to attend the individual meetings. Since they want your presence, you can attend as a non-member. In Westchester there are only two of these so you can pick one or the other or neither – or you can even go to both if spending money makes you feel that an event is more valuable.

2. You can also pay for the "one of a kind" networking groups which now cost even more than a chamber group described above. Only one person from each discipline is allowed to attend the group. The mission is to look for businesses for the others in the group, after you have understood exactly what they are looking for. You are told that "givers gain" based on the presumption that if you give away leads to a business, it will be given back to you. This may or may not be a correct assumption – some people are luckier than others. What really works is to find a group where someone is in a business that hires you – a writer – or you hire them – a designer. This way you can not only cross refer but whenever one



of you gets business, there is business for the other. Check out this synergy – you might not get many leads without it. There will likely be two free "visits" permitted before you join.

These groups meet once a week or every other week. That can be a major problem if the person you are trying to hook up with cannot be present every week. They might eventually drop out which can hurt you. Keep looking, you might find a group that is worth a tab of almost \$700 in returned business. The friendship by the way can be great, as great as the business, and lingers on to reappear on Facebook and, more to the point, LinkedIn.

Networking groups that are offshoots of professional organizations present an excellent opportunity to gather business leads. They exist in many different professions, e.g. law has the Bar, and within the Bar are the various legal specialties. I started my business within the local chapter of a national Mortgage association. It attracted all the complementary disciplines to the mortgage transaction, such as title companies, real estate lawyers, mortgage brokers and bankers. It lasted 15 years and succeeded in branding me as the go-to public relations and marketing company for the industry. I travelled to the regional meetings, and again when I

was president, to the national meetings, including Alaska!!!! Unfortunately for all in this group (National Professional Mortgage Women) and men too, it closed in light of the negativity that had befallen the mortgage industry.

If you are in a financial field or looking for a financial field, such as investing or accounting, there are groups for you. Put your Web hat on and find them. If it means travelling a big distance and there is nothing local, try out the one in Conn. or NYC and then start a group yourself!

It is amazing how many groups have popped up for all businesses this year – let's face it, things are slow and we need to get out there. Many of these groups are free; you just pay for your beverages. Some of them have mini-trade shows (very mini), and I got a client that way. There is one that meets on Mamaroneck Avenue in White Plains. For some reason that works best for me, but everyone has a favorite.

To conclude, I believe in rather small and specialized groups as well as mixing it up. Don't go to the same group every time, unless you are sure new people are coming. It's nice to know people, but not if there is no sign of interest in your business.

Make sure you are "on the list" to be told of events; you can get this sometimes via the social media – people will ask whether you are coming. It's good to show support by bringing a business friend. If the person needs a job, make sure he/she brings some kind of business card for the occasion. Without one, no one will remember to call.

Finally, write on the back of the cards you took what action you plan to take. Or file the card for your e-newsletter or in your contacts. Run around as much as your energy will take you; you only have one chance to make a really good connection.

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