

# **If networking were an elite sport...**

## **12 tips for networking in 2012**



Australian  
Institute of  
Management  
QLD & NT



## **FOREWORD**

In August each year, the Australian Institute of Management celebrates National Networking Week – a week of activities dedicated to promoting the art and science of networking. When we first started out in 2006, there were some early and eager participants, a few quizzical looks and more than a few questions. Why focus on networking – it can't be that hard? Why would I want to mix with people who want to sell me something? In my profession, we don't really go to networking events!

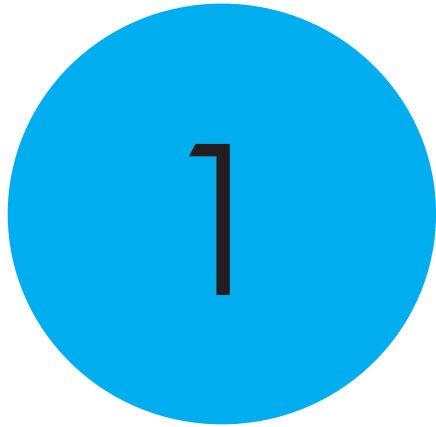
But the idea took on, evolved and grew as people began to discover that networking is essential to personal and professional development. We found most people thought of networking as attending external functions. This may increase your circle of acquaintances, and broaden your thinking and understanding of sectors other than your own, but it is not anywhere near the whole picture. Networking is as important inside your organisation as it is outside your organisation. William C. Byham noted in *T+D Magazine* that in the past, individuals had all the knowledge and information necessary to perform well. However, the amount of information now required to be successful outpaces the knowledge one individual can possess. To be a deep expert in anything will increasingly require superior internal networking skills regardless of your profession.

We also found that many people underestimated the consistent effort that networking requires. Not a ridiculous or random effort but consistent effort that is comfortable to you. An elite sports person knows that what they do in practice, what they consistently focus on, will reap results. And so it is with networking. You have to plan, practise and get out there and do it.

Career development and progress depends on a mixture of your technical or hard skills and your tactical or soft skills. Networking is one of the most important soft skills to develop because it will open your mind to a world of possibilities, perspectives and fascination. I trust you will enjoy our 12 networking tips for 2012 but I know there is a lot of wisdom out there, so I would love to connect with you and learn your tips. Email them to [enquiry@aimqld.com.au](mailto:enquiry@aimqld.com.au) and together we will enhance the power of networking.

**Vivienne Anthon FAIM**

Chief Executive Officer, AIM Qld & NT



## A WELL CRAFTED NETWORK

According to Rob Cross and Robert Thomas, it's high time to move on from the old adage "it's not what you know it's who you know". They say it's much more important to **craft a core yet diverse network** of between 12 and 18 people who can support more learning, less bias in decision making and greater personal growth and balance. They point to a pivotal balance between connections that promote career advancement and those that promote engagement and satisfaction.

Cross and Thomas identified **six critical forms of connections**. High performers have strong ties to people who offer them new information and expertise, formally and informally powerful people who help influence and people who give developmental feedback and challenge their decisions.

The most satisfied executives have ties to people who provide personal support, those who provide a sense of purpose or worth and those who hold them accountable for physical, mental and spiritual balance.

# 2

## CONSISTENT AND PERSISTENT

Networking is about being consistent and persistent. As Scott Ginsberg (aka the Nametag Guy) once said “**consistency trumps rare moments of greatness**”. So it is with networking which involves developing a networking cadence that will sustain you for the long haul and will not suffocate nor obligate others.

This is a deceptively simple reminder, which encourages us to avoid the fits and starts that characterise many of our efforts. “Gee, times are tough...I’d better get onto LinkedIn and get out and network.” A cyclonic appearance online or face to face with no follow up or follow through is to a large extent wasted effort.

Ginsberg is also a great believer in the **consistency of abundance** – he has always given freely of his ideas and writing (in fact he recently gave away access to all his books) in order to develop others and tangentially his business. Think about what you are consistently giving away that is of use to others.

# 3

## FACE TO FACE STILL WINS THE RACE

Networking online is unlimited in its scope and speed. Those clever little algorithms can put you in touch with others even while you are sleeping. However, nothing is as powerful as a face to face interaction.

Says Lesley Dewar, “Nothing will replace the value of genuine face to face contact... Being able to look someone in the eye; laugh with them; hold their business card and talk one on one about your mutual businesses is absolutely the best form of networking.”

Effective networkers have a **well considered plan** for those events they will attend face to face and consistently stick to it.

Alan De Back warns against randomly attending professional meeting or networking events. He suggests volunteering to coordinate saying, “Volunteering will make it easier for you to network and meet people because you will have a purpose at the meeting or event”.



# 4

## MEMORABLE AND CREDIBLE

The studies vary on just how long it takes to make a first impression, but all make the same general point – it's not long. In a world of endless options and trends, there's even more pressure to achieve cut through. Many a good networking tip list will extol the virtues of being memorable or having something distinctive about you. This is true but only half the story. You must **balance being memorable with being credible**.

When it all boils down, being memorable is about having a comfortable gimmick – something that you have or do that people will remember and which sits comfortably for both you and them. As they say in the racing game, "Never wear a hat that is bigger than your personality".

Being credible means being very good at what you do and **willing to offer assistance** to those you meet with no expectation that they will do something for you in return. Memorability without credibility is grandstanding. Credibility without memorability limits your personal and professional potential.



# 5

## ATTIRE STILL COUNTS

The concept of attire is closely linked to being memorable. In a world where the rules for appropriate attire are blurred and becoming more so (except perhaps at Royal Ascot) it is still important to get attire right. Do dress for the occasion and if in doubt it is better to go up a notch.

The style experts are consistent in their mantra – **better to overdress than to underdress** and to show less flesh rather than more. Nothing beats heels and hose for the ladies and for gentlemen an outstanding jacket and tie can take you just about everywhere – the tie can always be removed.

My grandmother used to say that you could “tell a man by his shoes”. So make sure your shoes are always polished and well presented and that heels (flat or sky high) are in good condition. A professional look can be ruined by inappropriate footwear.

If you are in any doubt about the dress code, call the person running the event and ask them what sort of clothes they will be wearing.



# 6

## WIELDING DIGITAL INFLUENCE

Wielding digital influence through an effective online network requires three things – **reputation, specialisation and network position** – according to Thomas Davenport and Bala Iyer.

They say that online, as in the face to face world, reputation is currency. Reputation can be built by offering interesting content, drawing attention to your web presence and **motivating others to circulate and act on your ideas**. They also suggest assessing your reputation through services such as Klout, Identified, PeerIndex and Empire Avenue.

Specialisation is all about demonstrating and sharing deep knowledge, learning from and with communities of shared interest. Online networkers also understand network positioning and place themselves as bridges between otherwise unconnected groups. LinkedIn Maps and Touch-Graph enable users to visually examine their networks for “connections, clusters, density and redundancy”.





# 7

## GRABBING QUICK FEEDBACK

Most of us like to be asked our opinion – it is esteeming and it is inclusive. **Effective networkers put their contacts to work.** They ask for quick feedback on challenges or ideas. Cleverly leveraged, this concept can work face to face or provide an international peer review at warp speed. The key is framing the right questions for the right crowd at the right time.

Asking for feedback also requires an understanding of and comfort with putting things out there to be commented on and potentially passed on. If you're up for it you will be amazed at who will provide feedback and the perspective it might afford you. It may potentially put you in contact with whole lot of people you did not know.



# 8

## THE WORLD IS YOUR OYSTER

David Topus believes that **everyday random encounters** can expand your business, career, income and life. In his 2012 book *Talk to Strangers*, he encourages people to take advantage of those they come into contact with everyday. Topus espouses four beliefs of successful random connectors:

1. The world is a friendly place – this will give you the confidence to approach others
2. Everyone can be met – if approached appropriately and respectfully most people are willing to connect with others
3. Almost everyone you meet can enhance your life in some way – even if it isn't obvious from the beginning
4. You can enhance the life of everyone you meet – it might be in expertise, experience, services or insight

So prepare yourself for random encounters at weddings, at airports and on airplanes, at coffee shops and conferences, in the elevator or in the queue at the supermarket. **You never know who you will find.**



# 9

## THE PLATINUM RULE

2011 National Networking Week ambassador Devora Zack says the golden rule we were brought up with, to “treat others as you want to be treated”, is one of the most often quoted treaties in the land of being nice. She suggests that there is a more important rule – the platinum one which says “**treat others how they want to be treated**”.

Applying the platinum rule puts two highly challenging skills into play:

- Can you quickly assess, more or less, another person’s communication preferences?
- Are you flexible enough to modify your own interactive style to complement others?

Aspiring to the platinum rule requires **modifying your communication to some degree** with every person you meet.

# 10

## GENDER MATTERS

Ivan Misner, founder of BNI International, has made networking his life's work. He found **men and women are closer together in most aspects of networking** than expected.

He provides the following advice to women for effective networking:

- Don't get stuck in proving your credibility
- Communicate exactly what you want help with
- Share your accomplishments

For men, he suggests:

- Slow down and build the relationship by listening and asking relational questions
- Make and maintain eye contact
- Don't make assumptions that women don't take their business seriously

# 11

## RENAISSANCE OF THE BUSINESS CARD

Given the prominence of social media and online networking, the future of the business card looked particularly grim, until it became obvious that **people still respond to the tactile as well as the visual.**

The physical business card serves many purposes according to a spirited defence posted on bizdharma.com. They cite the fact the business card acts as a recall tool (removing the need for others to remember your exact name or search Google), promotes your brand in the way you want it to be promoted, serves as an advertising pamphlet, acts as an ice-breaker and serves not only the person you give it to but potentially his or her contacts.

You may not have control over the design of your business card – although if you do you can design something that is **memorable and credible.** (Check out some of the most fabulous looking business cards around at [stocklogos.com](http://stocklogos.com).)

# 12

## IT'S ALL ABOUT THE REFERRAL

The most important word in the world of networking is the word referral. So says Lesley Dewar, a networking expert and author of *Networking to a Plan*. West Australian Lesley is a poster child for being interested and interesting. She describes herself as entertaining, engaging and committed to educating children through story telling. She loves social media, haiku, travel, parenting, marine life, environmental issues and at the date of publication had 62,641 tweets, and 14,684 followers.

The lady knows a thing or two about networking and her mantra is clear:  
**To get referrals, you need to give referrals.**

She advises against jumping in immediately with a referral unless there is an obvious need that is solvable on the spot. Instead, she suggests making a note of the other person's needs and seeing what you can do to help. She says, "A referral is not doing business with you. A referral is finding a third party to do something for them that you cannot".

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