

Now is the time to network...

Due to the current economic climate it is a critical time to strengthen both the sales and networking skills and processes to see results in your business. A systematic approach to networking will distinguish the people that will thrive in this environment to those that will struggle.

Networking can be used as a sales tool and when used in a systematic method can create new business, repeat business and referral business for you.

During times that are tight the 'customer' is generally driven by emotion, family and security. To fully strengthen your abilities to secure, maintain and generate referral business you need to be ready with a savvy skill set in assuring the customer that all three of these needs will be met.

Networking is a planned activity and not an ad-hoc must do because business is slow. The strength of your traditional networking skill set must contain the ability to follow up with **EVERYONE** you meet, ensure that you are focussed on the benefits to the potential customer not the features of a particular product or service. Develop a high need to be as diligent and consistent in your approach to networking as possible.

In many industries when times are tight there is a tendency to let go of both training and networking expenses, when in fact these are the two areas that you must be **investing in** as they are what will keep you ahead and a leader in your field.

Customers want to see confidence and consistency, they want to be assured of both the people and the companies they are dealing with.

A well structured networking budget is an essential tool in our current economic climate. Take the time to develop a six month networking plan and budget for it.

Follow a simple formula for planning your networking activities by identifying your goals; identifying the most appropriate places to network for you and your business; identify the activities to do; assign and delegate time to each activity and finally create your budget.

Start by looking at your diary and determining how much you are time and money you are willing to invest in networking for the next six months.

Secondly, set yourself a definite budget and include as many costs as you can here some that are easily overlooked:

- ☑ Travel (to and from events, don't forget to include parking costs)
- ☑ The cost of follow up (in particular time, make sure that you schedule time in your diary)
- ☑ Postage (for sending out nice to meet you cards)
- ☑ Phone calls (for those important let's meet up calls)
- ☑ Food & beverage costs (for coffee, breakfast, lunch, dinner, drinks meetings)
- ☑ Cards, stationery and marketing pieces that you use to follow up with.

Finally, take action. Look for the best return on your investment where time and money is concerned. Research, plan, budget and take action each day, a day that passes without action is a day wasted and potentially the loss of your biggest opportunity!

Sue Henry is an Australian networking expert and co-author (Network or Perish). She is in demand as a public speaker, motivator and small business expert and has just released her latest book "Accelerate Your Business, Yourself and Your Networking Skills". Visit www.suehenry.biz or call 1300 88 56 50 for further information.