

Anyone who goes online knows that there is a lot of advice telling entrepreneurs to use in-person networking to build their businesses. But, in many cases, owners don't see the necessity or they think they can just use social media, or they do not want to pay to join a networking organization. The truth is we are a society of doing business with those we know and trust. It is no longer about just shopping price or visiting a website to make a decision. Most business owners know that trust is a huge selling point and that trust cannot be built behind closed doors.

### **Networking**

The word alone makes some people uncomfortable. You attend events, meet people, exchange business cards, diligently follow up... and then disappointment. Why are you doing all this networking if no one responds?

The problem is that most people think networking means selling. Unfortunately, that puts everyone involved on the defensive. Also, we know that so many people are either networking in the wrong groups or networking too much and not doing it the right way.

*Please note: If your group is looking for a speaker, I offer an interactive program called "Networking 101: The Who, What, When, Where, Why and How."*

So, with so many networking groups and events available, you could potentially be having breakfast, lunch, and happy hour every day.

And, some of these groups charge a lot of money for membership and then you pay again to attend the events. It is true that I built my business on networking, but it takes a lot of time and diligence.

If you are considering a way to network with no monetary cost (just your time), then you might want to consider using MeetUps.

### **Free Yourself from the Pressures of Joining a Networking Group**

You may wonder why so many business owners struggle with networking.

Ordinary networking fails because so many people attend networking events for the wrong reasons. They want to sell something or ask for a favor. Think about it. A lot of people who are only interested in promoting their own businesses approach you. A few of them may turn into legitimate leads, but you never get much out of it for the time invested. Unfortunately, too many people learn how to speak of their businesses but do not learn how to listen.

## **Meetups as an Alternative to Traditional Groups**

Identify those Meetups that interest you and are business-related. Check and see who else is a member of the MeetUp. Once you have identified your niche, start connecting with people. Start establishing your credibility in your industry.

In case you're wondering "What's a Meetup?," Meetup is the largest network of local groups in the world. With more than 10,000 groups of like-minded people getting together every day, Meetups are one of the easiest ways to find other people who share a common interest or cause.

For example, when I searched for "small business" Meetups within 50 miles of where I live, I found 103 events on the first page of results.

Of course, when you attend these events you want to do much more than just hand out business cards and sing your own praises. The goal is to make genuine connections with other attendees and find out how you can add value to their situation. Can you introduce them to a valuable connection? Is there a way you can help improve their business? When you approach a new business relationship from a giving perspective, you become a valuable part of the other person's network.

### **Why This Works**

The first reason is that most people are terrible at building relationships. Sad, but true.

Secondly, it's face-to-face. According to Harvard Business Review research, 95% of people said that face-to-face meetings are a key factor in successfully building and maintaining long-term relationships. 79% said that in-person meetings are the best way to meet new clients to sell business. 89% agreed that face-to-face meetings are essential for "sealing the deal."

Finally, there are always Meetups taking place. So you're in control of how often you connect with potential prospects.

And if you can't find a suitable Meetup, start your own.

The truth is, most things people consider "networking" are really just a waste of time. If all you are doing is attending large events, handing out your business card, and pitching yourself to everyone in sight, you will never accomplish your goals. Small business owners can get better results using Meetups to grow their professional network.

Think of how much more enjoyable and productive your networking time can be if, instead of always hunting for new business (often the proverbial "needle in the haystack"), you focus on how to become more valuable and indispensable to your business connections.

That being said, I am still a fan of our local Chamber of Commerce, but that does not mean that MeetUps haven't played a role in my networking efforts.