

7 Innovative Ideas for Low Cost Networking

BY ROBYN HENDERSON

Tough times and cash flow shortages call for innovative ways of keeping in touch with people who form part of your strategic alliance network. Our target may have been to initially communicate and ultimately build trust with spheres of influence in the community, who know a little bit about a lot of things and a lot about two or three areas. Often one of these areas is their work and passion, the other two may be sporting or cultural areas and the third often a charity or support group. These key networkers in the area can open many doors for us, once they feel confident enough with our level of professionalism, service and ability.

Sometimes master networkers test us with a small job – a throw away, fiddly, low profit job and we may question, is it really worth doing? Many suppliers have missed valuable opportunities by knocking back that one job, only to find it was in fact the tip of the iceberg and in being unavailable for that work, we have lost the opportunity to have the door opened to their vast network and unlimited referrals.

So lets look at ways to increase visibility within your network – in ways that do not incur huge \$\$ or time. With each of the following ideas – be very clear – THIS IS NOT A SELLING OPPORTUNITY – DO NOT SELL. This is purely a building trust, letting them get to know you better exercise. Be very clear on this – increased visibility is your outcome – and sales will result from this ultimately. This is a strategic BE SEEN, GET KNOWN, MOVE AHEAD exercise.

1. FITNESS – exercise is a great way to stay connected. You may mention that you have started a fitness program involving daily 3-5 km. walks and invite some of your allies along. Set up a time, meeting place and days of the week to meet– don't be discouraged if you only get a couple of takers – word will spread and your group will expand. And if it doesn't that's okay too. Once you have a core group of starters, you will find that you build trust very quickly with these people, in a non-threatening environment.

2. VOLUNTEERING – as you get to know the main spheres of influence in your network, observe the charities they may be involved with. Most charities have fund raising events throughout the year, and each event usually has a committee or special interest group. Offer your services to one of these committees. Be realistic about your time availability and avoid over-commitment. However, your skills can be put to good use and you are constantly expanding your network plus supporting a worthy cause. If you are already too over-committed for a committee position, why not offer to arrange a table or two of friends to support the event.

3. SCHOOL LEAVERS INFORMATION NIGHTS– a very successful real estate agent had a regular annual commitment with the local high schools speaking to year 11 and 12 students. The basis of her talk covered the do's and don'ts of renting units, bonds, setting up a flat for the first time, selecting good flatmates – all the things school leavers needed to know in their first year out of school. A comprehensive handout was always included for the participants with her contact details. Non real estate agents may consider they could not offer this service. However, any employer could speak to students about what employers are looking for with apprenticeships, part and full time employees –

everyone has something to offer this very impressionable group of future leaders.

4. WORKING BEES – Rotary clubs are famous for working bees in old peoples homes and aged communities. Again your expertise in gardening, painting, even rubbish removal can come in handy. It's just a case of looking for opportunities, identifying them and then offering that opportunity to someone in your network.

5. MOVIE/VIDEO NIGHTS – if you are a movie buff, this area is truly limitless. By starting a mid week movie night, with like-minded people/potential allies – you create an opportunity to really have some fun. Again create a system – select potential movie goers, choice of two cinemas (one mainstream theatre / one more arthouse), decide on approx. session time and meeting place in a café close to theatre. You may decide to meet at the café, say 30 minutes before the session starts and then adjourn to the café after screening for coffee and debrief about the film. Each member of the group has an opportunity to select a film over a period of weeks and you can give an /10 rating – and prizes for the highest rating movie selector over a period of time.

6. ACADEMY AWARDS NIGHTS – there are all sorts of awards today from film, through to sport. The Academy Awards or Golden Globes is a great way of having some fun and networking with like-minded people. You might like to arrange an informal dinner on the night these events are screened and at least 72 hours before, ask each guest to vote on who they think will win the awards – prizes of course for the winner who selected the most winners.

7. MELBOURNE CUP SWEEPS – Running a Melbourne Cup sweep for your customers, allies and prospects is a great way of keeping in touch. Decide on the prizes (maybe you can swap/barter a voucher for your business with another organization), make a list of customers who will be involved with the exercise. Email them 7 days ahead to let them know to expect to hear from you on Melbourne Cup Day and what the prizes will be. Draw the sweep on the first Monday in November and then another email, fax or phone call will let them know their horse. Make sure the prizes arrive within 48 hours of the race being run. Be prepared for lots of positive feedback.

These seven simple ideas take organization more than money or time. However, if you can combine your own networking with having fun – watch out for all the business opportunities that come your way as a result of just doing things a little bit differently from your competitors.



Robyn Henderson

Global Networking Specialist, Robyn Henderson has authored 5 books on networking and business building. She has spoken in 10 countries, presents over 150 times each year and has never advertised. all her work comes from referrals, networking and her website:

www.networkingtowin.com.au

You can contact her on :

phone: (61+2) 9369 1025

fax: (61+2) 9369 1053

email: inetwork@ozemail.com.au