

# Networking is the Future!

## *Networking is a two-way street, with the door to opportunity swinging both ways*

By Donna Messer

I wrote an article almost 10 years ago entitled “Networking is the Future”. Little did I realize just how important networking would be when it came to career transition, increased sales, marketing opportunities and personal relationships.

With networking, it’s not what you know, but rather whom you know that is the key to success. It’s how you build and maintain that rapport between you and those you know that will make networking work for you. We all need referrals – but to take advantage of someone you know, just to make a sale or find a new client is misusing your network. Today, networking is a two-way street, with the door to opportunity swinging both ways. There must be a benefit to each side of every referral or it’s not networking - it’s simply abusing your contacts.

According to Robyn Henderson, Australia’s networking guru and author of *Networking for Success*, “Moving from one network to another gathering business cards and simply showing up does not improve your chances for new business opportunities. You can spread yourself too thin and get more referrals than you can manage. Many people make the mistake of establishing dozens of alliances, forgetting that maintaining these connections properly takes time, money and plenty of energy.”

Networking is the future, and your future success will only be guaranteed if you learn to network effectively. Establish a plan - determine just how much time you can spend keeping that network current. Gather your resources and referrals and keep them up to date. Give before you get – it’s proven that by helping others, you help yourself.

Top 10 points to effective networking in the future:

1. **NETWORKING IS A HIRING POINT** - Employers may ask prospective employees whom they know. They may be asked to demonstrate through role playing their ability to network in a variety of situations.
2. **NETWORKING IS A LEARNED SKILL** - Many large organizations today are impersonal and in silos. It’s easy to get lost in the crowd. If you know how to network, soon everyone will know you. You become a linchpin for the company. In order to gain the most from your job opportunities, good networking skills are a must.
3. **NETWORKING IS PART OF MANY TRAINING PROGRAMS** - Large and small firms include courses and seminars on effective networking as part of their training schedule. Networking is recognized as an important business skill. Some firms already have role playing activities in which the trainee is asked: “What would you do if....?” Networking programs are being introduced to business where questions like “Where would you go to get the following information....?” will be asked.

4. **NETWORKING IS BEING TAUGHT IN SCHOOLS** - Not long ago business schools stressed statistics, finance and economics. Now, more soft skills are being introduced, among them are Stress Management, Organizational Behaviour, and Relationship Building. Networking (another name for relationship building) will become an important part of most school curriculum and will be an entire course by itself. It will teach students how to use effective networking to find career opportunities and to volunteer.
5. **NETWORKING HAS BECOME MORE FORMALIZED** - You may not realize how many networks, both formal and informal that you are part of. As networking becomes a more recognized and appreciated skill, your personal network (church, school, hobby, special interest) will become more valuable. Statistics show that our “social capital,” those we know both inside and outside of our career or business, is crucial to our growth.
6. **NETWORKING HAS BECOME MORE SPECIALIZED** - Long ago we saw “unclassified ads” soliciting everything from pets to people. Today we see “classified ads” channeling our needs into recognizable sectors. Networking will become more discriminatory and specialized, classifying leads by category. Your networks will become valuable assets and should be listed on your resume.
7. **PROFESSIONAL NETWORKING ORGANIZATIONS WILL ABOUND** - Networking organizations are the next set of “yellow pages”. By joining these specific organizations you have access to a wide variety of information and an invaluable list of personal contacts. Fee for use is often the case and “a return on investment”, should be done before joining any of these groups.
8. **NETWORKING KEEPS COMPETITIVE BUSINESSES IN BUSINESS** - Getting together to get ahead will be a highly valued skill for any business. Strategic Alliances and joint ventures will be the networking wave of the future. Isolationism and refusal to network will drive some businesses and industries down.
9. **NETWORKING RELATIONSHIPS WILL DETERMINE PROFITABILITY** - It pays to cooperate. Think about all of the strategic alliances that are being built so that everyone benefits. Banks partner with not-for-profit organizations. Healthcare organizations are partnering with pharmaceutical companies. All levels of government are beginning to share each others resources.
10. **NETWORKING WILL CREATE BALANCE** - Professionally and personally our networks will become intertwined. Good networking skills will create a balance between the warm personal contacts and the impersonal aspects of a business connection. Networking will provide a strong bridge that will link effectively the personal and professional networks we will need to survive in the next millennium.

*Donna Messer is one of Canada's foremost experts on Networking. She is the founder of ConnectUs Communications Canada, the author of the Canadian best seller, "Effective Networking Strategies", a key note speaker and a business coach. Connect with Donna at [www.connectuscanada.com](http://www.connectuscanada.com)*