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A How-To Guide from RainToday.com

Face-to-Face Networking for Professional Services

A Primer for Relationship Building

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Guide Excerpt:

The Basics: Creating Your Networking Strategy

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Face-to-Face Networking for Professional Services:

A Primer for Relationship Building

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The golden rule of networking:

Givers Gain

To become an effective networker, start by thinking about what you can do for others. You will be surprised by what you get in return



Introduction

Most professionals will agree that their best leads come from referrals. The reasons are twofold: 1) People ask for referrals when they have a need; 2) When people ask for referrals, they ask a trusted source. When that trusted source gives the referral, the service provider receives a certain amount of “transferred trust” from the giver of the referral.

Here’s how it works. Potential clients who need a service typically ask someone they trust to tell them who they might use. They listen to what their sources have to say, i.e., “I’ve worked with them for years and they’re great. Definitely give them a call.” These types of referrals are so powerful because of the “transferred trust” mentioned above. With a referral you don’t have to start from scratch as you would a “cold” sales contact. Assuming the referral is a good one, the prospect already has a certain amount of trust in your abilities when they call you. But, how do you get these all-important referrals in the first place? Through relationships. And networking is a great way to begin and develop strong relationships.

In this guide, designed specifically for those new to networking, we lay the groundwork for success in three sections:

- ➔ **The basics—creating your networking strategy.** Before you go out and begin networking, you need to have a plan in place. In this section we address the networking basics – the 5 W’s (who, what, where, when, and why).
- ➔ **Relationship building in action.** This is the “how.” In this section we provide the tips and tools you can use in your own networking efforts.
- ➔ **Keeping your network fresh and active.** Advice on how to stay in touch with those in your network and keep it up-to-date.

ICON KEY	
	Worksheet
	Key takeaway

A word on social networks like LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, and others: these technology-based tools do have a place in networking for professional services (in fact, we’re saving social networks as a topic for its own guide). But, whether or not you tap into the technology tools, you need to start by building a strong foundation for all your networking activities.

Networking takes hard work, persistence, and risk, but the reward can be great. So first, equip yourself with tools you need by reading this guide – you’ll find valuable information, worksheets, and key takeaways. Then, waste no more time...put it to action!

And remember, RainToday...Dark by Midnight.

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Key Takeaways from this Guide

- When it comes to networking, use the resources you currently have available, and then broaden them by expanding your efforts. Be precise, but don't overlook the hidden potential that is all around you.
- You can network anywhere, with anyone. When looking for organizations to join to help you build your relationships and connections, choose groups where you can make a contribution and will be interested in what is going on.
- Communicating your message is a means of gaining credibility that is best accomplished through substance, not style. Listening and asking questions helps you build rapport and trust. Practice your communications until you feel confident that your message will come across as genuine and unscripted.
- Most of us can't just show up at an event, stand around, and expect people to come up and talk to us. Be proactive and start conversations with others. This does not mean that you have to be the center of attention and the life of the party. Simply be yourself and the rest will fall into place.
- Keep the conversation fresh and interesting. Balance the amount that you talk with the amount the other person is talking and ask open-ended questions.
- Exit quickly from conversations that aren't good matches. When you find good conversations with people who could be the right fit, don't be too quick to leave. A few rich conversations and good new connections can make for a very successful event.
- When it comes to networking, knowing what not to do is as important as knowing what to do.
- No matter which method you choose, follow up is crucial to your networking effort. Follow up turns a casual contact made at a meeting, party, or event into a potential long-term relationship.
- In the end, networking is all about building relationships that are honest, sincere, and of value to both parties. As you work to stay in touch, try to develop relationships that benefit the other party as much as they do you. Build relationships for the long-term.
- The best part about building relationships is that whatever you put in comes back to you. More and better relationships mean a greater likelihood of generating leads that you can convert into great opportunities for your business.



The Basics: Creating Your Networking Strategy

It's All About the Relationship

This guide is all about networking. However, here's something to keep in mind right from the start: Networking is a means to an end, not an end in itself. And that end is building and sustaining *relationships* with people. The word "networking" may bring to mind thoughts of busy bars with rapid fire business card exchanges, insincere glad handing, and constant elevator pitching. This isn't what we're talking about. When we refer to effective networking, we're talking about creating authentic and honest relationships. By focusing on how we can help others to succeed and prosper, we contribute to their success, as well as our own. But first things first: we have to meet people of similar minds who will be good connections.

Are you familiar with the open source computer operating system Ubuntu? Or the rallying cry of the Boston Celtics basketball team— "Ubuntu, ubuntu, ubuntu!"?¹ Derived from the African Bantu language, the word *ubuntu* roughly translates as "I am what I am because of what we all are together." Whether you are a member of a sports team, a community group, or a business—the concept of *ubuntu* applies. It is a humanistic philosophy in which we achieve our potential through others—by being unselfish, generous, and trustworthy.

The authentic relationship-based approach to networking is one that even the most introverted professional services practitioner can adopt and feel good about. Ubuntu.

¹ Author's note: Go Celtics!

Why Is Networking Important

Referrals top the list of how buyers find professional services providers. In RainToday.com's report *How Clients Buy: The Benchmark Report on Professional Services Marketing and Selling from the Client Perspective*², we asked 200 buyers of professional services how they initially identify potential service providers. Their top two answers centered on referrals:

- Referrals from colleagues—80% of buyers are somewhat or very likely to find service providers this way
- Referrals from other service providers—75% of buyers are somewhat or very likely to find service providers this way



Through first networking and then sustaining relationships you are able to increase the likelihood of generating these valuable referrals.

What Is Networking

If networking is so important, why do so many people avoid doing it? Many professional service providers simply fail to understand what networking is or the benefits it brings. We like the American Heritage Dictionary definition:

Network (*verb*): To interact or engage in informal communication with others for mutual assistance or support.³

Key to this definition is the concept of *mutual* benefit. Use this as your touchstone to remain focused on the positive (and effective) elements of networking.

² *How Clients Buy: The Benchmark Report on Professional Services Marketing and Selling from the Client Perspective* (RainToday.com, 2005).

³ *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language: Fourth Edition* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000).

Networking is and isn't

Before we address *how* to network, let's dispel some of the myths around what networking is (and is not).

Networking *is* about:

- Building relationships *before* you need them—or laying the groundwork to produce good results.
- Building relationships with people you can help and who can also help you—it's as much about what you give as it is about what you get.
- Teaching people what you need from them, and what they can expect to get from you in return—in other words, keeping the lines of communication open both ways.
- Trusting that if you put energy into your relationships you will receive something in return—which means *not* keeping a rigid scorecard.

Networking *is not*:

- Something you do *to* someone.
- Going to conferences and collecting a lot of business cards.
- Manipulating people to get them to work with you.

The golden rule of networking

In this guide we provide a variety of tips and tactics you can use to organize and prioritize your networking activities and set them in motion. But, if you go into the process thinking that networking is just “collecting business cards” or “reeling in favors,” you’ll be disappointed. Networking in its simplest form is about giving, not about getting. The more you give, the more you get in return.

Following the golden rule of networking will help your efforts pay off:

Givers gain.

Remember, to become an effective networker, start by thinking about what you can do for others. You will be surprised by what you get in return.

Who to Network With

Take a strategic approach to calibrate *who* needs to be in your network. It won't be the same for everyone. Does your network need to include CEOs, senior partners, politicians, regulators, doctors, small business owners, community leaders? Develop a strategy to reach your target contacts. Ask yourself: What might be of value to them that I'm able to deliver? What will encourage these people to begin and continue an interaction with me? It's important to find these levers and build them into your value proposition.

Prioritize your touch plan: you can only maintain a finite number of deep connections

You can develop deep and lasting relationships with a finite number of people. So keep a tight focus on your targets and build a network that you will be able to keep up with and maintain. For some people, you'll be able to foster a connection initiated at a conference with periodic emails or phone calls, but with others you'll need to devote more time, maybe by scheduling periodic lunches, attending professional or social events, or meeting on the golf course or at the gym.

Knowing the three target categories of potential networking sources will help you focus your energy and prevent you from wasting too much time moving in the wrong direction.

Prospects. These are the people who can use your services, and therefore are valuable both as buyers and links to other buyers. Look for them at industry association meetings, conferences, and other networking events. Use white papers, seminars, and other value-based offers and experiences to show them the benefit they will derive from knowing you and potentially working with you.

Referral Sources and Influencers. Your networking efforts are designed to bring you business—or connect you with people who can refer you to others. Either way, you win. Influencers are those who may not be able to use your services directly but can steer you towards the right people in their own firm or another firm who might want to get to know you. Influencers have the power to open doors if they are willing to pass your name along.

Clients. Don't overlook your current clients. They are a great source of referrals, and if they are pleased with the service you provide, they will often be more than happy to pass your name along. In professional services, where many clients are teamed in projects alongside their competitors, there is a great opportunity for business-to-business referral—but even if your clients love your work, sometimes you have to ask.

Finding the super-connectors

Although your networking effort should be as broad and varied as possible—within the scope of your business goals—you will also receive a considerable boost if you learn how to target the super-connectors. These are the people who, either

through their profession or their personality, have the ability to bring people together.

Targeting super-connectors can open up your network to a varying array of individuals you might never have met otherwise.

How do recognize or find a super-connector? While it is possible for these connectors to be found anywhere, they are typically in people-focused careers. Many super-connectors are executive recruiters, lobbyists, fundraisers, public relations people, politicians, executives, professionals, and journalists.

Building Your Networking List

Begin targeting who should be in your network by creating a list of good prospects and referral sources for your services. Here we take you through a process that will help you develop a broad list. Then you can refine this list into a manageable set of targets.

Step 1: Looking for opportunities

There are opportunities for networking just about everywhere you look. These are a few starting points to consider as you begin building your list:

See Worksheet (page 9)

Coworkers (past and present). Coworkers are a great starting point for your networking list. Often they have contacts and connections from past jobs, school, and life experiences that you can leverage. Get to know your coworkers and become a part of each others' networks.

Clients. Your current and past clients should form a strong plank in the platform of your network. These people already know what you do and can clearly articulate the value you provide.

Family and friends. Although frequently overlooked, family and close friends should be an important part of your network. Some people hesitate using family and friends as a networking resource. But consider this: if your family and friends don't know you, who does? Don't underestimate the value of family connections. Make sure your family members know exactly what you do, what services you can provide to others, what problems you have solved or are looking to solve, etc.

Bosses (past and present). Most firm leaders have their own strong network, made up of personal and professional connections. Many are willing to lend their support because they have gotten to where they are due, in part, to the people who helped them along the way. In the early stages of network building, consider taking a boss or company partner out to lunch to pick his or her brain or discuss a specific issue you are having. Many times they will offer to connect you with people they know.

Schoolmates. Whether you met in high school, college, or business school, contacts you made throughout your education are good people to add to your network as they often work in a wide range of industries and jobs.

College professors. Professors—particularly those who were your advisors or with whom you had a close relationship—are usually willing to lend their support. They are not only great connectors, but also provide a resource for you to use as you lay out your networking plan.

Service providers. Your lawyers, accountants, and brokers probably work with clients in a variety of industries and may prove valuable as connectors. (If you are a lawyer, accountant, or broker, your clients are key referral sources and networking contacts—be sure they know about the different types of clients you work with and services you provide.)

The truth is: Networking can and does happen anywhere, so make sure that no matter where you are, you keep your networking list front and center. Opportunities are everywhere, and you never know who knows whom.

Here are some additional places and people for you to think about:

- Neighbors
- Volunteers you work with in charity or other organizations
- Acquaintances from recreational activities
- People you meet through your kids (coaches, teachers, other parents)
- People you may meet at airports, bus stations, on the train, etc.



Brainstorming tips

As you develop your list, make it as specific as possible, refining it as you go. Your end result will be a valuable resource of specific names at specific companies in specific locations.

Don't rule people out just because you assume they won't have an interest in the service you provide. Your yoga instructor might not be a good prospect for your services, but that doesn't mean she won't spread the word to other viable prospects.

Step 2: Refining your list

Step 1 is meant to be a jumping point for your networking list. It is a place to start. But, a network is much more than a list of names. It is a group of people you can count on – people you can help who can also help you.

See Worksheet (page 11)

Your goal is to actively maintain relationships with *all*, not some, of the people in your network. If your target network is to be composed of mutually beneficial relationships, it must also be a manageable size.

It's a good idea to have no more than 50 people on your list of active networking contacts (although some people are more comfortable with 10 or fewer and keep those relationships very close, and others can handle 100 or more). To refine your list and develop one that will help you achieve your goals, take the list you created in step 1 and evaluate each contact on it by asking yourself:

- Does this person have the same types of clients and customers as I have?
- Do they have connections with any of my current prospects (further conversations may be needed to determine this)?
- Can I provide value to this person in the conversations we have?
- Does this person buy from the people I want to reach?
- Is this person an exceptionally strong networker?
- Does this person have influence in my target market?
- Are there specific names not currently on my list but who I know would add value to my network?
- Assuming I already know the person, do we connect well?

Prioritize your new list by placing emphasis on those contacts that seem to have value in any or all of the above areas.

List building
mistakes to avoid

Many service providers are sabotaged by targeting efforts that fail or miss the mark. A few of the most common mistakes to avoid include:

Targeting only those on your level. Try to get “two people ahead” of where you and most of your current network are. If you can reach out to a person two levels above you in the corporate ladder, they can open up a whole new echelon of potential contacts.

Snubbing others. Working your way up does not mean you have to step on everyone you meet along the way—be courteous, helpful, and kind, and you will reap the benefits of recommendations, assistance, and inside information.

Dead-end networking: Just because you keep in touch with some people doesn’t mean you’re doing a good job networking. You’ve got to ask yourself constantly whether you’re building relationships for collective success. You might end up with a lot of friends (and that’s not bad), but that may not help you achieve the career success you’re looking to achieve.



Key takeaway

When it comes to networking, use the resources you currently have available, and then broaden them by expanding your efforts. Be precise, but don’t overlook the hidden potential that is all around you.



Worksheet: Beginning Your List

The best networking strategy begins with those you know—and then branch out and refine from there. On the pages that follow list everyone you already know who you can add to your network. Use the categories provided as a starting point, and build from there.

Your network

Category	Name	Reason
Family	• • • • • •	• • • • • •
Friends	• • • • • •	• • • • • •
Clients	• • • • • •	• • • • • •

FACE-TO-FACE NETWORKING FOR PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

Coworkers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • • • • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • • • •
Bosses / Company leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • •
School- mates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • •
Professors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • •
Service providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • •
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • •



Worksheet: Refining Your List

Working from your list of current contacts, complete the sheet below. You may be surprised at how your current network can help you reach those on your wish list.

Directions

Networking Planning Sheet		
People I Want to Meet	What I Can Offer Them	Who Can Help Me Meet Them
Prospects (prospective clients)		
Influencers (sources of referrals)		
Clients (sources of referrals)		

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- **Strategy and Brand Development:** Service firms are often at a loss for how to grow. They don't know what strategies or tactics will work, and when they do, they often don't know how to make them most effective. We understand the distinct challenges of growing, branding, and managing a service business. Our core strategy and brand development services include helping our clients develop strategies for growth, craft marketing and business development plans, and research their clients and their markets.
- **Marketing and Lead Generation:** Lead generation for business to business services is different than most other industries. We understand the unique dynamics of service businesses and know what tactics will be most effective to help you generate the leads, the revenue, the relationships, and the brand you need to grow. Our core services include helping our clients generate and nurture leads with our *Services in Demand* program, craft and execute brands and core marketing messages, build and execute website and Internet marketing strategies, and become thought leaders through thought leadership development, marketing, and PR.
- **Sales Training and Performance Improvement:** Making the transition from service provider to Rainmaker, balancing your responsibility between delivering services and selling services, and creating a culture of business development at your service firm are all challenging tasks. We work with leaders, professionals, business developers, and marketers to help you create a business development culture while giving you and your team the sales skills and tools you need to succeed. Professional services firms turn to our *Rainmaker Development ProgramSM* to help their professionals develop the skills and get the coaching and support they need to become leaders in new business and client development.

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Now Available: [Face-to-Face Networking for Professional Services: A Primer for Relationship Building](#)

What is the key to effective face-to-face networking? How do you set your networking activities in motion? How do you keep your network fresh and active?

The word “networking” may bring to mind thoughts of busy bars with rapid fire card exchanges, insincere glad handing, and constant elevator pitching. But, those who are successful at networking know that networking goes beyond business card gathering and is really about building and sustaining meaningful and beneficial *relationships* with people. By focusing on how you can help others to succeed and prosper, you contribute to their success as well as your own.

Face-to-Face Networking for Professional Services: A Primer for Relationship Building will provide you with the tips and tactics you can use to organize and prioritize your networking activities and set them in motion.

In this guide, you will learn:

- The golden rule of networking
- Who to network with and where you can go to find them
- 3 tips for starting a conversation
- 6 open-ended questions to get contacts talking and to build a relationship
- How to get into (and out of) any conversation
- Networking dos and don'ts
- Tips for following up along with sample notes, emails, and voicemail messages
- How to evaluate and replenish your network

Face-to-Face Networking for Professional Services includes **6 worksheets** you can use in your quest to become an expert networker:

- Beginning your list
- Refining your list
- Identifying where to network
- Uncovering your value
- Elevator pitch formula
- Sample networking touch plan

Face-to-Face Networking for Professional Services will provide you with tips and tactics you can use to organize and prioritize your network activities and set them in motion.

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