

# Managing For Success

## Networking Will Go Where No One's Business Card's Ever Gone Before

BY MOREY STETTNER

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One time-honored business practice that will really morph in 2007 is networking.

Business people hunting for new contacts used to attend breakfasts or mix-and-mingle parties after work with like-minded folks. They would shake hands with strangers, recite their sales pitch, exchange business cards and hope to profit from at least some of these new acquaintances.

Networking matters more than ever as the New Year kicks off. But what used to be a hit-or-miss gamble fraught with wasted time and forced conversation is becoming a well-researched science, thanks to business shifts and technology.

Some of the inspiration for new networking approaches comes from sales.

Diligent salespeople track the number of outgoing calls they make to prospective customers in a given week. They also keep tabs on the number of people they reach and the number of appointments they schedule as a result.

But more advanced methods to quantify the referral process are starting to take hold, says Ivan Misner, founder of BNI, a referral organization based in Upland, Calif. These methods include forecasting sales from referrals and comparing your monthly projections to the actual results.

"By setting goals for your referral marketing activities and then measuring the percentage of total business you get from these activities, you can create a system that helps you continually refine your networking," said Misner, co-author of "Trust or Delusion." "More people are starting to think this way."

Networking in an Internet age is easier in the sense that you can access a wealth of information about a person or organization in just a few seconds through an online search. Yet this comes at a cost.

As influential leaders get more inquiries from people seeking to connect with them, they are less inclined to respond with enthusiasm. That means networkers need to stand out from the crowd to make a favorable impression.

"Given the ultraconnectivity we have now — where finding out how to contact people you don't know is so fast and easy — the importance of using third-party introductions is going way up," said Doug Hardy, general manager at Monster Careers, a unit of **Monster Worldwide** ([MNST](#)) in Maynard, Mass.

Another tactic to bolster connections is through reverse networking. Instead of contacting others to pitch yourself, let them come to you and judge for themselves whether they want to contact you.

An emerging strategy to bring others to you involves "demonstrating your credibility and expertise online," said Steven Van Yoder, author of "Get Slightly Famous."

He foresees more networkers employing this three-step process in the years ahead:

- **Identify Web sites that serve your target audience.** If you want to network with insurance brokers, for example, get familiar with Web sites for agents' professional associations and trade groups.

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• **Write informative articles and get them posted on those Web sites.** Your articles, which should be no longer than 750 words, must provide valuable content. Avoid a promotional tone. You don't want those articles to "read like advertisements," Van Yoder said.

• **Dangle an incentive for readers to contact you.** In your bio at the end of the article, offer something of value that people can receive free if they get in touch with you. For instance, provide a link to your Web site so that readers can download a free booklet or resource guide.

"Entice people to drop into your world where you offer them a solution," said Van Yoder, owner of Get the Word Out Communications, an online marketing firm in San Francisco.

Old-fashioned networking, by contrast, lacks efficiency. You can attend dozens of gatherings and come away with few valuable contacts. Yet even this traditional model is getting a 21st century makeover.

Some say networking should be faster. Speed networking offers a more structured environment for meeting strangers. Participants typically rotate from person to person, spending a few minutes with each.

"Speed networking can be effective in today's fast-paced business world," said Mindy Selinger, who leads networking training programs for Link System in San Diego. "Speed networking tends to attract those who never attend typical networking events."