



# InGenius

## Review

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A review of  
great thinking  
from

INGENUITY  
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*a marketing and training firm that works primarily with professional service organizations and small businesses. We offer strategic marketing planning and coaching, marketing program development, and curriculum and training mainly in the areas of consultative selling, professional service marketing, and customer service.*

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## *A Networking Primer for Professional Service Providers*

By Wendy Nemitz  
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*This is the first of two articles about networking. This one focuses on expectations for success and specific skills. The second article focuses on how to choose a professional networking group.*

With the numbers of books and articles published on networking, you might mistake it for rocket science. It's not. Networking is just about connecting with other people, building relationships, and adding to the group of people who like you, trust you, and want to do business with you.

All successful networking takes is the guts to introduce yourself to a few people you do not know, some interpersonal skills, and a dash of follow-through. So why do many people try networking with little success and others build vibrant referral networks and get loads of business?

Before your firm sends people out to network, it is important to understand how networking fits within the framework of the professional service sales cycle and to have reasonable expectations.

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### *Expectations for Networking in the Professional Service Sales Cycle*

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Most networking how-to guides are not about the professional service sales model. They offer up a "run-through-a-bunch-of-people-tossing-them-your-card" model that simply does not work for the high-trust, long cycle of a typical professional service sale or referral.

Professional service providers rarely get new clients right away in any networking experience. If you are selling law, accounting, or other services, you network to begin relationships, not close deals. Look for introductions that will be followed up later with a business meeting or meal. And after the follow-up meeting, you will need to continue to build trusting relationships, often for years.

In any situation, look to meet both people who can become your clients and people who are upstream referral



sources – those who can send clients to you. Expect to only meet a few of these people at any one event.

Align your expectations. Instead of expecting business to come directly from a networking experience, expect relationships that may pay off years down the road to begin there. You will have to create the relationship – with meetings, lunches, a subscription to your firm newsletter, referrals to them, and with other contacts that build trust.

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## Begin Now

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One of the biggest mistakes professional firms make is keeping their staff and managers focused only on technical work. Then those senior people, armed only with technical skills, are suddenly expected to bring in new business when they have neither the skills nor the connections to do so.

The time to introduce staff to networking skills is within a year of hiring them, even if they are right out of college. Bring them with you to learn how to shake hands, present a business card well, talk about what they do in an engaging way, and feel comfortable with people they do not know.

Most of the people looking for contacts at networking events are on the newer side. Young bankers, lawyers, CPAs, and other sources of referrals can grow up together. When your young staff is ready to move into senior positions, their peer group will be too. It takes years to develop an excellent referral network. Begin now.

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## The Rolodex 20

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As every good Rainmaker knows, it can take three to five years to close a professional service deal. Creating these deep relationships takes time and commitment. By the time they are 35 years old, all professional service providers should have 20 people in their Rolodexes who are great referral sources.

Those 20 names should be people they could call in the middle of the night and borrow money from, not just bankers they met once at a Chamber meeting. They need to be deep relationships.

If your firm does not insist on every person having the Rolodex 20 before they make partner, you will

soon be top heavy with technical people with nothing to do. Partners are the sales force and they need to have mature referral relationships in place before they can generate new business.

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## Basic Skills for Networking

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After understanding why it is important to network, the next thing you need to arm your staff with is the basic skills required to build a thriving network. Don't assume everyone is skilled at this process. Many people feel awkward in social situations. Many do not know how to shake hands well or how to give a business card away with grace. Teaching your staff solid skills through a training or mentoring program helps them enjoy their experiences and creates more value for you.

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## First Impressions at an Event

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Whenever you attend a networking event, whether it is a networking group, large trade show, or client event, prepare and package yourself in advance.

Prepare yourself by bringing up as much extroverted energy and enthusiasm as you can muster. Package yourself with good, unfussy clothing that suits the tone of the event and make sure you bring:

*A firm handshake.* Nothing is worse than a wussy handshake. If you are not used to shaking hands, practice!

*Plenty of business cards.* Not the bent, folded, and written-on kind and not buried in your purse or brief case. Bring the crisp cards with all the right information readily accessible in your pocket.

*A bright smile and enthusiastic presence.*

*A nametag with your first and last name and firm name clearly written.*

*A good commercial.*

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## A Good Commercial

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A good commercial leverages introducing yourself and your work in a dynamic and thoughtful way so that others know who you are and what you do. Introducing yourself well is



an excellent opportunity to get to know others and talk about yourself and your business in a positive way.

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## What Not to Do

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Most people introduce themselves sloppily: “Hi, my name is Susie.” This not only presents a less than professional image, it gives the other person absolutely no information so that they have to go digging. While a few people are happy digging into your details, most are not. It is much kinder and more professional to introduce yourself in a way that helps the other person know who you are and what you do.

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## What to Do

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A good commercial is simple if you spend a little time crafting it. Most people write down several versions and practice often until they are smooth and comfortable. You should use your own words and make it sound like you, only better. Here are the rules for a good introduction:

*Rule #1:* Focus on the other. Look the new person in the eyes. Offer your hand. Smile.

*Rule #2:* Introduce yourself with your first and last name. Speak slowly and clearly so that the other person can understand you, especially if you have an unusual name or an accent.

*Rule #3:* Tell the person your job and where you work. You can say, “I am a tax manager at XYZ company, a CPA and consulting firm in Minneapolis.” Never just say, “I am a CPA” or “I am a lawyer.” It is too generic.

*Rule #4:* Give another tidbit of information – something they might be able to relate to or ask questions about. You might add, “My job is to help people and businesses keep more of the money that they make. That means I work throughout the year to make sure all of our clients take advantage of every legal method to save taxes.” You can see how this might encourage the other person to ask you a tax question – which is exactly what you want to happen!

A little enthusiasm on your part encourages the other person to talk to you. If you are a personal injury attorney, you might say, “My job is to help people get their lives

back. It is almost never about the money. When people are in terrible car accidents or hurt in other ways, they suffer. They lose their jobs, their houses; they get bill collectors calling them. We help them with all of those problems, not just the money.” This encourages the person to share a story about someone they know who might have been injured.

*Rule #5:* Make sure you ask the other people, even if their introductions are weak, what they do and who they do it to. Nothing is more interesting to others than the chance to talk about themselves. Ask leading questions about the other person and you’ll be considered a great conversationalist!

The most important part of good commercials is writing them down and practicing until you will never respond with “My name is Susie.” With practice, they become automatic and authentic.

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## Finding the Right Fish

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There are usually only a few people you will want to meet. Business bankers, for example, can be excellent referral sources to accountants. Identify who you want to meet in advance whenever possible. Spend most of your time with the best prospects. Go through a whole tradeshow looking for the booths of people who can be referral sources and introduce yourself when traffic is slow. Focus on the few because your relationships have to be deep.

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## Introducing Yourself to People You Do Not Know

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The most important thing to remember is that the room is probably full of people who are standing around, hoping someone will talk to them. You will be perceived as gracious if you simply walk up to people and open with simple questions like:

*Hello, have you been to this event before?*

*I don’t think we have met. My name is...*

*You’re from XYZ Bank? (Reading their nametag)...*



You do not have to be a brilliant conversationalist. As a matter of fact, it is better to be a good listener. Ask the people about themselves and about their companies. You can ask questions like:

*How long have you been an attorney?*

*What types of law do you practice?*

*What does your firm do?*

*How has the economy impacted your practice? Do you think we are recovering?*

*Do you enjoy your work? What do you enjoy most?*

Most people will think you are both warm and brilliant if they get the chance to talk about themselves. Ask several questions, find out if this is a person you will want to get to know better, and then talk about yourself and your business.

When you talk about yourself, present your business card. Present it so that it is readable to the person as they receive it—face up with the type facing them. Never throw your card across the table to anyone! After you have met a person with whom you wish to follow up, be sure to write a few notes on the back of their card to aid your memory later.

You do not have to stay all night with one person. It is expected at these types of events that you will speak with several different individuals. You can easily excuse yourself by saying:

*I will just go freshen up my drink.*

*I just need to talk to that person over there.*

*It was nice to meet you.*

*It was nice to meet you; I just have to make a quick call.*

*I hope to see you again.*

## Different Types of Events

There are many different types of events that offer successful networking. The graph below can help you think about which types of events are a good fit for your personality.

	DEEP RELATIONSHIP	WIDE RELATIONSHIP
GENERAL AUDIENCE	Small networking group Service group with continuous membership	General Chamber meeting Service group with changing membership
SPECIFIC AUDIENCE	Industry roundtable with regular members Utility CFO group	Industry trade show Limited service group such as a religious group

**DEEP AND GENERAL:** If you are a person who prefers to know most people in the room but is interested in knowing about a wide range of occupations and having contacts in many industries, Deep and General is the category for you. Most small networking groups fit this box. They invite only one person from each profession and meet regularly with a stable group. Service groups, such as a small Rotary Club, also fit this description. You will get to know people well in Deep groups.

**WIDE AND GENERAL:** If you are a person who likes to meet new people and find out all kinds of interesting facts about various industries, you will enjoy this box. A big Chamber of Commerce meeting will allow you to practice your people meeting skills and expose you to all kinds of professionals. If new people and new ideas interest you, network Wide and General.

**DEEP AND SPECIFIC:** If you like to both know the people who will be at an event and a lot about the industry or other focus, this is your box. A group of CFOs who all work in manufacturing and meet monthly could make great contacts for you. If you are most comfortable going deep with both your expertise and your relationships, Deep and Specific is the category for you.

**WIDE AND SPECIFIC:** If you need to meet people in a specific industry or are an expert in one area, but enjoy meeting new people, an industry trade show or large event is for you. You will meet all kinds of people but know they all have something in common to spark conversation. This is also a good category to expand your niche marketing as all the people at the event have an industry or interest in common.

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## Conclusion

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Networking is not rocket science, but your expectations, level of skill, and success in finding the right fit for you all determine whether you are successful. Ingenuity Marketing Group has developed a networking and other practice development skills training program specifically for professional services providers.

If you would like to hear more about this program or need help expanding your practice, please call Wendy Nemitz at 651 690 3358 or Maggie Stoerzinger at 651 303 4204.

Ingenuity Marketing Group is a firm that helps professional service providers set marketing strategies, implement tactics, and most importantly, helps people and firm cultures shift into a positive growth model.

**InGenius**

*Review*

