



InGenius

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Successful Networking Groups

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This is the second article in a series on networking. The first focused on developing expectations and skills. This one develops guidelines for choosing a professional networking group.

Almost all professionals try a professional networking group at sometime in their careers. Most of these groups meet regularly and allow only one professional per category (i.e., one CPA, one banker) into the group. Almost all charge a fee to become a member but if you have ever started your own group, you will know that good groups are worth their fees because it takes a lot of work to create one.

Networking groups vary quite a bit in how well they deliver leads to individual members. Some networking groups help members not only grow as professionals, but help them develop a thriving group of contacts who deliver great leads. Other groups wither into coffee klatches of a few friends who rarely even discuss leads or new business.

The keys to creating a powerful networking group are in developing the skills of each member. Here are a few key principles for any successful networking group member:

- ~ Make sure there are enough members or that the group is growing rapidly. It takes a while to get a stable, core group of seven or eight people. Ask how many leads are given in any month. Ask who attends regularly and attend at least two meetings as a guest before you commit. Make sure the focus of the group is on giving leads and bringing in new members.
- ~ Check to see whether most members are business-to-consumer focused or business-to-business focused. While anyone may know someone who can use your services, look for groups where several members may know many people who can use you.
- ~ Expect to give. Take an active role in giving leads and ideas to other members before you expect to receive leads in return. Get to know everything you can



about other member businesses. Take time outside of group meetings to spend time with other members, look at their websites or other promotional materials, and use their services and products, if possible.

- ~ Bring energy and enthusiasm to meetings. People like to work with fun and lively people. A fun and lively group attracts more new people than a quiet group.
- ~ Run your group professionally. Start on time and end on time. Consider a small fine; say a quarter or a dollar, for coming in late. Money collected can be donated to a good cause or be used to pay for the breakfasts or lunches of guests.
- ~ Elect a strong president and vice president who are energetic in meetings and willing to work to keep the group growing. Your executives are more than the people who keep the calendar. They may have to call a member who is not giving leads or not attending. They may have to mentor new members. The president makes a lasting impression on guests who are considering membership.
- ~ Choose a comfortable and upscale meeting place. Upscale will attract upscale. A cramped room with a bad “vibe” will drive people away.
- ~ Serve a meal at the meeting. Eating together is a strong human bonding custom. It is much better to charge more and serve a meal than to charge less and skip this important ritual.
- ~ Make sure each of you makes a presentation to the group that is lively and specific. Talk about case studies of customers you have served well. Success stories help people understand what you do. Don't be generic or ask for “anyone who needs my services” leads. Ask for specific types of leads. Talk about your pricing and who has benefited from your product or service. Practice your presentation. Avoid jargon and make your explanations simple. Rehearse. How many times do you have a group of professionals in front of you who are here to help you increase your business? Use the time well.
- ~ Make sure each of your shorter commercials – what you say about yourself and your business – is specific.

It is much more effective to ask for one small thing than many large things. If you are selling cellular service, you will get more leads by asking for families who have teenagers into many activities than if you just ask for anyone who uses telephones. If you are selling life insurance, it is better to ask for names of anyone who is pregnant or who has had a baby in the last year than everyone who has children.

- ~ Give commercials for other members. If you or someone you know uses the services or products of another member and it works out well, be sure to tell everyone.
- ~ Warm up any leads you give to others. Whenever possible, call the person in advance and tell them who will be calling them and why you think they should use this particular vendor. Warm leads work much better than cold leads. Other members will appreciate it.
- ~ If a lead is just an idea and you don't have a specific lead name or inside connection, be sure to tell the person it is an “idea lead.”
- ~ If you are looking to join a networking group, you can call your local chamber of commerce or look in the local paper business calendar, which usually lists several different groups.

Conclusion

Networking is not rocket science, but your expectations, level of skill, and success in finding the right group for you all determine whether you create business. 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.

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.