



Power Networking: Get In, Get Out, Get Business

by [*Karen Di Prima*](#), *communications manager at Flaster/Greenberg PC and member of PRSA Philly News Committee*

Even in this Web 2.0 world, nothing beats the power of the face-to-face encounter for creating or sustaining personal relationships. That said, why do so many otherwise gregarious, people-loving PR professionals bemoan networking events as a total waste of time? Quite frankly, the answer is: Because they're doing it wrong!

If you are weary of leaving yet another after-hours event empty-handed except for a fistful of business cards that will marinate in your contacts list for months, try the approach outlined below. By managing your networking efficiently, you will achieve better results. But what may really surprise you is that, with a little preparation beforehand, you will likely spend half the time you currently do, doing it.

Get In — Power Preparation

1. Choose wisely. Focus on events that will benefit you. A common misperception is that larger events increase your chances of making beneficial contacts. Do not rely on mathematics alone. Study the program description as well as the "Who Should Attend" text to determine whether the attendee demographics correspond to your practice objectives. Call the organizers and press them for details to determine whether the event truly is as advertised, and will attract the kind of people you are looking to meet. Register, checking the fine print to make sure you can cancel and receive a refund if Steps 2 and 3 below don't work out.

2. Scrutinize the attendee list. A week prior, ask for a registration list, which many organizations will provide, and study it. Review company affiliations and titles. Identify two to three individuals you are interested in meeting. Take it a step further and start thinking about why they would want to meet you, and what possible value you can bring to the relationship. This is critical to your efforts, as shown below.

3. Research the individuals you have targeted. Use Google and LinkedIn to find common interests, background details and information about recent business activities. A shared alma mater, hometown, charitable cause or hobby will make your introductions flow seamlessly. Make sure you are current on recent professional activities as well.

4. Reach out. Send a short, friendly email the day before the event, letting your targets know you will be attending and are interested in meeting them. If you have uncovered any shared interests or important career-related developments in your research, include this in your message, but tread lightly. This is not the moment for a sales pitch. Again, think about what you can bring to the table, instead of focusing in on what you want to get from the interaction.

Get Out — Power Onsite

5. At the registration table, ask the organizers if they would be willing to let you know when your targeted individuals arrive. This is a tremendous time-saver — no more surreptitiously scanning nametags while you work your way across the room. In addition, being introduced by the host’s representatives lends a subtle credibility to the connection.

6. Tailor your elevator speech to your prospects by thinking about why they should be interested in meeting you, and how you can help them. After receiving your email messages the day before, they will be curious to meet you, so make the most of it. Endeavor to engage in a memorable conversation, but do not dominate your targets’ time. Five to ten minutes is optimal. Your objective is to set the stage for a meaningful individual meeting to take place later.

7. Make it count! Gracefully exit, but obtain a future commitment. Acknowledge that you would like to continue your conversation; obtain the go-ahead to contact your prospect in a day or so to set up a lunch or dinner. Wait until you are both back at your desks to confirm a date and time; otherwise you may appear pushy, or worse — desperate.

8. Mission accomplished: Having prepared in advance and having followed the steps above, it is very possible that within the first half-hour of the event, you will have completed your objectives. No need to stand around for another hour or so nibbling stale cheese — your work for the evening is done.

Get Business

9. Your follow-up the next morning should express your pleasure at last night’s encounter and, “as agreed,” offer two dates for possible future meetings. Even if your calendar is clear for weeks, be cautious about appearing too available, for obvious reasons.

Your note should also reference the common ground you established during your conversation; so much the better if you can reinforce that common ground by referring to an interesting tidbit of information or by attaching a relevant article or link.

10. Once your meeting is confirmed, bone up on your research about the individual, the company and its clients. Armed with all of this information, most especially, think — and think hard — about what you can *offer* as opposed to what you *want*. This is a key shift in

mindset that actually makes a positive difference in your demeanor. It will help to convey to your prospect that you have his/her interests uppermost. Additionally, by thinking of your prospect's needs instead of your own, you will be more relaxed, more confident and feel less pressure to close the deal.

Conclusion

With far too little free time as it is, devoting any part of your day to activities that will not produce results just doesn't make sense. Maximize your opportunities by setting goals and preparing beforehand. If you are going to extend your workday for any reason, why not make the time and effort count?