

Strategic Networking in a Social World -

How to Leverage Social Media to Connect

By Lisa Kanda



Are you a strategic networker? Do you use social media to leverage your networking and create opportunities to connect?

The Internet and social media have changed how we do business, communicate and network with clients and prospects. Even more so, businesses are more constrained by time and money to invest in connecting and prospecting for business face-to-face. So how can you use social media to help make networking a better return on your investment?

Strategic networking using social media puts an end to shuffling from one event to another with a stack of business cards. Follow these four steps to get started.

1. Look at your calendar and write down all the networking events you attended in the last year. Be specific and list who attended, why you attended, and what potential business opportunities were available to you.

2. Set your criteria for what you expect from your networking time. Are you getting your name out there to brand yourself and company? Are you specifically looking for leads for business? Are you helping others connect and making referrals? Are you involved with the group in a leadership role? It's important that you understand the purpose of your networking time, and what your return will be for that time. You may have different criteria for different types of networking events.

3. Take a hard look at how much of your networking leads to new business. Make a decision as to how much your time is worth and how much of your networking time needs to be dedicated to getting new business.

4. Decide which networking events that you have been attending truly have given you a return on your investment. Be ruthless. You may want to continue events where you know everyone and have a good time socializing, but is that going to help you grow your business?

Now it's time to put strategy into your networking scenario. Who is your target market and where do they "hang out?" Social media will help you find the people who can potentially buy or use your services

or connect you with those who can. You want to strategically find the networking events that will help you meet your goals and make good use of your valuable time.

Making Strategic Connections On Line Leading to Off Line

LinkedIn – Your LinkedIn profile is only the first step in leveraging this powerful platform that is geared specifically to helping professionals connect with professionals. Two areas will help you connect strategically within LinkedIn.

a. Join groups - A strategic approach to joining groups will help you connect and share with your peers, purchasers of your products/services, and referral sources. Groups are local, regional, national and international. Many groups provide in person networking opportunities as well, so seek to join those groups to use both on line and off line connections. The groups tab is found in the top navigation on LinkedIn.

b. Search events – LinkedIn also has a searchable events calendar that can help you find events specific to your industry, business and target markets. The events page is found under the "more" in the top navigation on LinkedIn.

Facebook – While you may use Facebook for personal reasons, the groups feature provides an opportunity to either expand your brand reach with Facebook followers or provide you with a forum for more in depth discussion with your clients, prospects and friends. Many Facebook groups also provide in person networking events. Use keywords in the search bar to find groups related to your target market. To find out more about groups, go to www.facebook.com/about/groups

Eventbrite – You may have used this site to purchase tickets to an event, but the web site is also a great resource to search events by date, price, location and category. Search for events at www.eventbrite.com

Meet Up – This is a local community of people that hosts Meetups, which are face to face meetings between members. There are thousands of business related groups for networking opportunities. Go to www.meetup.com and type in your topic or interest and zip code to search for a group near you.

Remember to be strategic in finding the groups and events that will best match your criteria. After you have selected 3-5 potential groups or events, make sure you introduce yourself to the group. Do Not Sell! Instead, focus on getting to know some of the members and looking for ways to connect.

Bonus to networking on line first. Most groups that hold face to face events ask members to RSVP on line. Before attending the event, review the RSVP list of attendees and look at their profiles to find out more about them. Now create a list of people you want to connect with before you attend the event. After the event, connect with the people you met both directly and through group communication.

So stop wasting time and money by passively attending events that don't grow your business. By becoming a strategic networker, you can attend events with purpose and create outcomes that will impact your bottom line. ■



Lisa Kanda, Elkay Corporate Advisors specializes in leading, coaching, consulting and training businesses and individuals to help them be more effective and profitable. We use customized processes and practical guidance to help clients make strategic and informed decisions to achieve success faster and easier than they could on their own.

- Business / Marketing Strategic Plan Development
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