

The E-Revolution— Will Networking Change?

BY DONNA MESSER



THE NEXT WAVE IS COMING and if we want to succeed in the 21st Century we better be able to ride that wave! E-commerce is the topic on everyone's lips—what does it mean when it comes to building more profitable connections using networking?

According to Andersen Consulting in a special marketing supplement for the *Toronto Globe and Mail* the best strategy for companies to remain competitive is to think big, start smart, and scale fast!

Statistics show that Canada is in last place with only a 4.05% share of the global economy compared to the United States with 36.2%. How can we implement the strategies suggested?

The following suggestions will help readers "ride the wave":

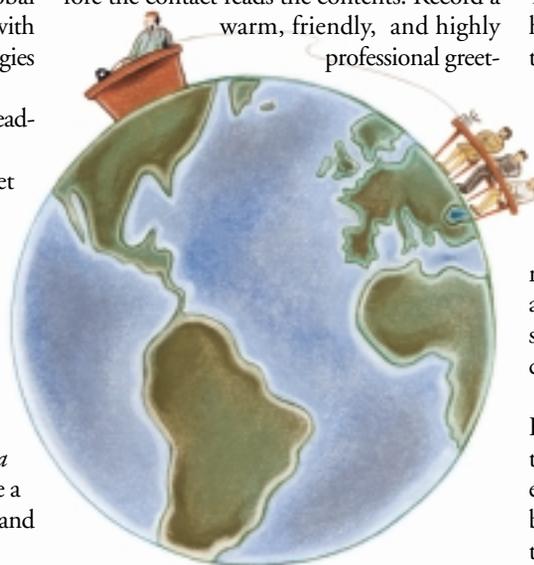
Know your market! Select your market (country) based on the need you perceive for your product or service. To find out if there is a need, connect with your embassy or consulate in the countries you are targeting. They have the knowledge and they will happily share—building your business is why they are there! Go to your local library or World Trade Centre—check out the *National Trade Data Base*—this is updated monthly and will be a wealth of information. You can subscribe and receive information on line.

Know your competition! Find out who your competitors are both domestically and internationally—who do they sell and export to? They probably have a web page. Check it out. Do they list their products and services? Do they have a catalogue? Is there an opportunity to joint venture? Connect with the *Chamber of Commerce* in the country you are targeting; ask for the membership directory. Use your resources—do you have colleagues from that country in your existing network? Who do they know?

Virtual Trade Events—Governments are moving towards specialized events that provide on-line trade shows that participants can log on, meet potential strategic alliances and joint ventures without having to leave the country. The problem being encountered by many is how to build the relationship, when

there is no actual face to face meeting with the contacts. The first and most important ingredient for anyone who is part of one of these events is to have an easy-to-navigate web site that provides not only a business profile, but also insight into the corporate policy of the management. Companies and individuals need to find common denominators in order to build a relationship that will eventually build business.

Learn Virtual Etiquette—Have an attractive front-end for all virtual contacts. Get an attractive fax cover sheet designed which conveys who you are and adds credibility even before the contact reads the contents. Record a warm, friendly, and highly professional greet-



ing on your voicemail. Speak slowly and distinctly—your international colleagues may not have English as a first language. Get a professional sounding email address that says who you are and what you do.

Become an articulate communicator—The fact is, you have to show your style by using words that provide the picture of a successful business person. Strengthen your vocabulary, improve the tone and quality of your voice. Get a better on-line personality, attitude is everything! Do whatever it takes to provide the expressive words, exclamation points, asterisks, and underlining techniques that interest and excite your potential client, customer, or partner. Don't use CAPS when emailing, recipients will think you are yelling and will simply push delete! You will have lost your

chance to build the relationship because virtually, you no longer exist.

Be "Ultra Sensitive" to the recipient—Imagine that the person receiving your email/fax/call has had a bad day, often there are very few clues, but be aware, sometimes it is better to assume the worst and communicate from there. Be friendly—misunderstandings occur more often in virtual communications than they do during an in-person communication. Wait 24 hours before replying if you find yourself upset by the communication.

Virtually touch the other person—use their name at least twice in your communication. You don't have the opportunity to shake hands, smile or make eye contact—repeating their name is one way to bridge the gap.

Be succinct and absolutely accurate—Value the other person's time even more than you do your own. When communicating virtually, you're likely to be in touch far more often. Try to make your point in four sentences. Check your email for spelling, grammar—double check for accuracy of phone and fax numbers, and email addresses and instructions. Don't gossip—virtual privacy is becoming an oxymoron.

Adopt an end of business day reply policy—For every hour that you don't respond to a virtual communication, you'll lose 1% of whatever the opportunity was, whether it's new business, the chance to retain an unhappy customer, or helping an employee do their job well. After four days, you don't have much left. Reply promptly for the best results and the greatest credibility.

The electronic revolution will change the way we do business—we will need to become more aware of our entire network, tapping into the resources and skills of our neighbours, friends, and business associates. No longer will we be able to connect face-to-face. Virtual referrals will become more important as we grow. On-line referral clubs, official matchmaking associations, relationship building experts, and introductions services will become the next "fast" product. **SBCM**

Donna Messer is an international speaker, trainer, facilitator and author. Founder of ConnectUs International, the company designs, develops and delivers business training programs. ConnectUs also offers a unique matchmaking service which links businesses to opportunities around the world. Donna is also Managing Editor of BusinessWoman Canada Magazine.