

Maximize Participation at Conferences and Trade Shows

BY DONNA MESSER

There's no avoiding the "N" word these days. We all know the benefits of networking – but how well do we practice it?

You are going to be part of a conference or trade show and you want to maximize your opportunities while participating. Good networking is trying to help everyone you meet connect with someone who will benefit from that introduction.

Networking isn't selling your product or service, it's selling you, and who you know!

Networking is linking resources

Think of networking as a chain, and each link you add gives you another connection, and that connection can provide another, and another and another. You need to become part of that chain – a networking resource that can help you reach anyone.

Sometimes you have to become a detective, looking into your past. Who do you know that might be a positive connection for someone you know now? You have to become a lateral thinker, defined in the dictionary as seeking to solve problems by unorthodox or illogical methods. Lateral thinking stretches your imagination and you learn to see a win/win scenario in every situation.

To network effectively, you must be prepared and that means doing your homework! Before you come to any conference or trade show, make a list of who you know and what areas of expertise they have. Order a new supply of business cards, make sure they have a complete address and if possible, a dedicated fax line, and an email address.

People you meet will want to connect with you in the quickest most economical way possible. Fax machines and email are fast becoming the chosen methods of business communication. Business letters delivered by mail are important, but to make the immediate connection after a networking event, fax or email is most efficient.

The following check list will help you maximize your participation at this conference:

- ◆ Have a plentiful supply of business cards;

- ◆ Work on your handshake, it says a great deal;
- ◆ Perfect your infomercial; take no more than one minute to introduce yourself;
- ◆ Arm yourself with several "good" questions that will lead to a connection;
- ◆ Set networking goals for yourself, exchange cards with at least 25 delegates;
- ◆ Make notes on the back of each card for follow-up.

Don't know how to perfect your infomercial? Need a few good icebreakers? Not sure what your goals should be? Visit the ConnectUs Web site. We've got all you need. Look under Gifts at www.connectuscanada.com.

Top ten ways to maximize participation at a conference.

1. Do Your Homework – Get details of the participants in advance if possible;
2. Ask for a list of exhibitors, delegates, etc.;
3. Draft a one-page fax/email introducing yourself in advance to delegates/exhibitors;
4. Suggest you are looking for strategic alliances. Use the words: "How can I help you?"
5. Have lots of business cards – sometimes it is a good idea to have your picture on it, particularly when you are in a country where we all look alike;
6. Connect with your embassy, local chamber of commerce, and any service clubs you belong to. This way you are expanding your network in and out of the conference;
7. Use the Internet – connect with clubs, associations and lists in advance. Set up meetings to explore possibilities for joint-ventures and strategic alliances;
8. Think laterally – make all introductions a win/win, don't just look for what's good for you;
9. Have a Web site that provides details on you, your company, and your products and services; people can check you out during the event;
10. Draft a profile of yourself, list who you

know, friends, associates, neighbours bring that profile with you – they could be important when making profitable connections.

Who makes up your network?

Everyone in your life is part of your network, and it's probably bigger than you think. They can all help you and you can help them. You must learn what you can about each individual. Their skills, experiences, talents, and needs. The people you know are "warm" leads. It's much easier to build on that warmth by expanding your knowledge of these people, than it is to pursue "cold" leads.

- *Family.* Look at each family member as a well-rounded individual with skills and backgrounds. You can tap into their knowledge and their networks.
- *Friends.* Your friends have skills you may not be aware of. Ask. They have their own networks. Ask to be introduced.
- *Neighbours.* Your physical proximity gives you a unique chance to develop closer ties. Find out who your neighbours are. You know you already have one thing in common – your choice of residence.
- *Professionals in your field.* You may not work directly with them, but you share the same career choice. You can advise and support each other over common issues.
- *Suppliers.* You do business with them anyway. Find out more about them. They might need your services.
- *Clients.* You serve them and you have built up a relationship of trust. Ask them to serve you in various ways, as suppliers, supporters, and referrals.
- *Co-workers.* You likely spend more waking hours with these people than you do with you family or friends. How well to you really know them? Find out more. You may be able to help each other.
- *Clubs or Association Members.* If you are involved with any community or professional associations or activities, you have a ready-made network. Most

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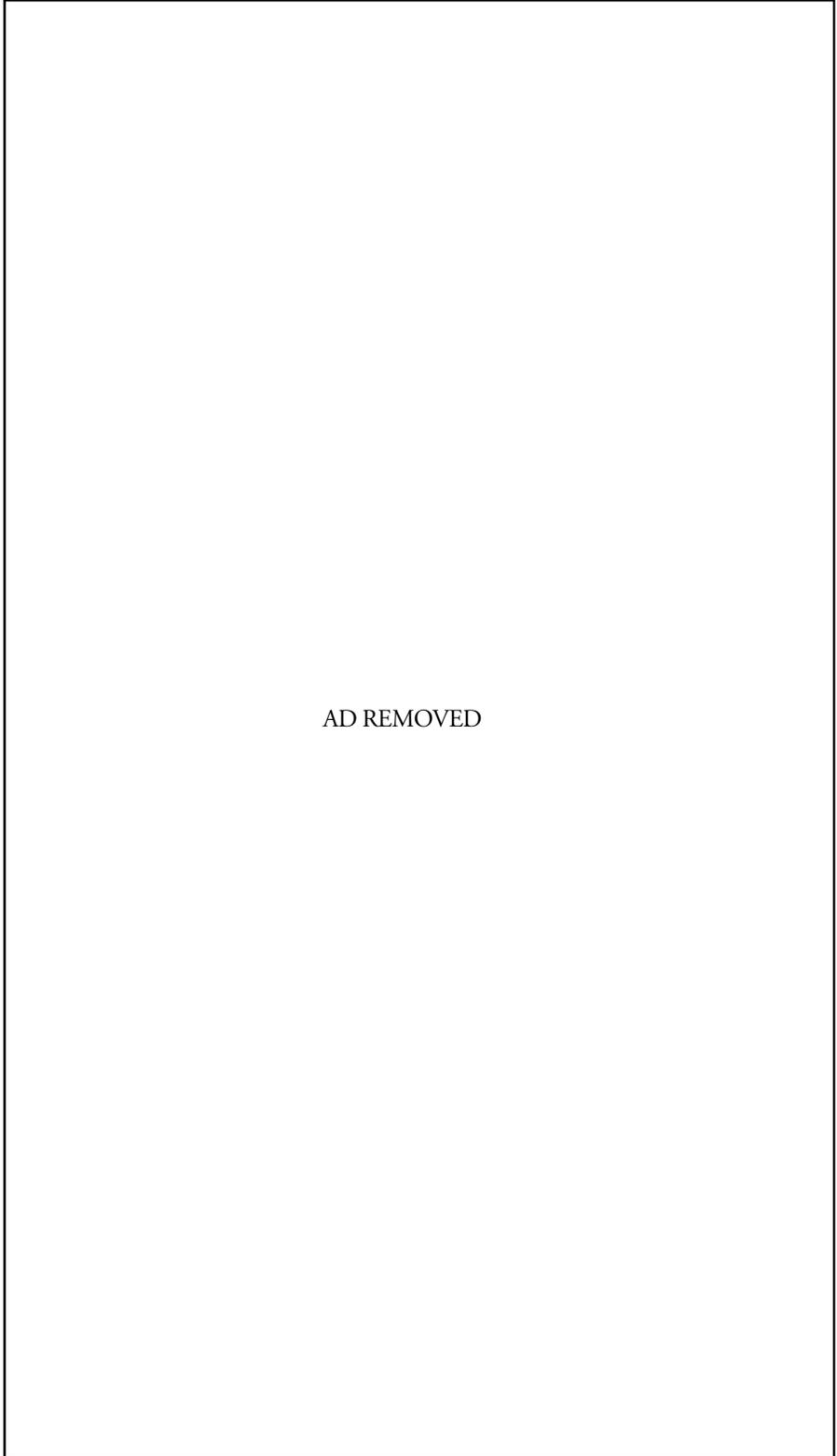
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people join these groups to meet others. The door is already open.

- *Volunteer Groups.* One of the most prevalent reasons people volunteer is to meet others and to feel a part of something. Get to know your fellow volunteers better.

- *Acquaintances.* You meet dozens of people in work and social settings. Don't waste these opportunities. Ask each person you meet to tell you more about themselves. Friendships often begin this way. Good networks always do. **SBCM**

Connect with Donna Messer. Visit her Web site: www.connectuscanada.com



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