

‘Business networking will enhance your company profile and thus increase your turnover’ – don’t make me laugh!

Well, that would’ve been my response in the past, but with a bit of social know-how, it really can work. What’s the alternative if you want to generate more leads for your business? Ah! Cold Calling! Y’know, that’s always been hard, never more so than now, it’s a sales technique people have become impervious to & in a downturn the resistance hardens further. Networking works because it’s a structured & continuous approach, you are on your target customer’s radar all the time, which is vital because a ‘buying need’ is often left purely to chance. Far be it from me to tell you how to do it, but I can share my observations & give a few pointers on how to survive the networking jungle:-

- Watch the pennies! To start with try out the ‘pay-as-you-go’ meetings first, don’t commit to weekly attendances & direct-debit payments until you are sure that it’s for you.
- With a date booked it’s quite normal to think ‘Oh No! Why did I agree to do this?!?’ Don’t worry, everyone has those moments so head for the ‘safe zone’ of the bar/buffet area, before long a networking veteran will spot you & shepherd you into the group.
- However tempting it might be, please don’t take a friend in the mistaken belief that it might help, it won’t. You will both end up huddled together adrift from the action with an opportunity lost – ‘Feel the fear & do it anyway!’ Whoever said that was on the money when it comes to networking!
- Be prepared to get out of your comfort zone (and your comfy bed for the breakfast meetings!). The mental ‘shove’ required will empower you.
- Stop Selling! Sounds odd, I know, but you will get your chance to shine & promote your business, everyone does, in the interim just be yourself, talk to others about their family/holidays/home etc & build a rapport, don’t people just love to talk about themselves! Oh, incidentally, people do business with those they like & trust so the sales pitch is redundant in this arena.
- As you head out the door with a bunch of business cards in your pocket, think about how you can help others, maybe facilitate introductions outside the group too – oh, by the way, those cards are the start of your new networking database – good luck!

Submitted by Sheila Smith of Gemini