



Financial Mail Women's Forum Blog #3: Time saving ways to network

Neil Munz-Jones published *The Reluctant Networker* in 2010. It has been featured in a number of leading publications such as *The Sunday Times*, *The Financial Times*, *The Guardian* and *People Management*. In the third in a series of blogs Neil shares some practical tips on good networking. This blog focuses on time-saving ways to network, building on one of the principles of good networking 'Do it while you don't need anything'.

People tend to find it much harder to network when they 'need' something, especially if they are looking for a job or new project. For some reason many of us find it awkward asking for help, even though these same people tell me that they are quite happy to be asked for help. Networking when you don't need anything takes a lot of this 'self-imposed' pressure away. All well and good you may say but I don't need anything because I already have a job...the problem is that my job takes up all my time so I find it hard to make time for networking.

So what are 'time-effective' ways to network for the busy person?

A great starting point is to make the most out of modern technology, particularly email and social networking sites. LinkedIn has become the social networking site of choice for the business/career aspect of most UK working professionals and makes it very easy for you to keep in touch with your connections. And if you are not a regular user of LinkedIn, other sites including Facebook and Twitter as well as other business networking sites also enable you to communicate quickly and effectively with your network.

Here are some activities that you can easily do to keep in touch. They do all take some time but a lot less than going to a networking event every week! Some are ones where you want to communicate with everyone in your network, others will be much more personalised activities.

General updates:

- Inform them of a change of contact details (email address, phone number etc)
- Inform them of a new role either within your company or when you change companies
- Get sponsorship for your charity-fundraising; given that it is about raising money for a good cause it has become an 'accepted practice' for people to do a mass email or message their contacts on LinkedIn or Facebook to ask for sponsorship for their fundraising activities
- Post a 'Share an Update' on LinkedIn (or equivalent on other networking sites) on what you are up to or an interesting article/book that you have read
- Christmas email message/card; if you are really short of time send a 'standard' one out to everybody but the more you can personalise it the more impact it will have. It's pretty easy

to add each person's name to a Christmas email message but even then I personally don't put a huge value when I receive this type of communication. I recommend adding a line or two that makes the message personal to each individual as this is a much more powerful communication. However this takes more time, so consider sending personalised messages to key contacts and a more general one to everyone else, depending on how much time you have.

Some people may find this 'mass marketing' approach uncomfortable so please remember the Principle from the last blog "Develop a style that works for you"; if you really find this awkward read on and work on more tailored messages. Also remember that the more 'mass marketing' the message is the less likely it is to be read.

Rather than contacting everyone you could tailor different messages to different sets of people. To do this efficiently you probably need to have organised your contacts into relevant groups (maybe customers, colleagues, suppliers, general networking contacts etc) via your database of contacts and e.g. on LinkedIn via the 'Tag' facility (use the Contacts>Connections tabs to set these up).

You can then do similar activities to those listed above to a more relevant target audience. Taking this to another level of personalization, how about more one-to-one communication:

- Make introductions; 'connecting' two like-minded people who may be able to network together is a great example of the 'giving' aspect of networking and can be done via a short email copying both parties and explaining why you think they should 'connect'
- Forward on interesting articles that are particularly relevant to an individual
- Forward on publicised jobs/projects that you come across that may be of interest to them
- Rather than just focus on a Christmas email, how about wishing a Happy Diwali (Hindu Festival of Light) or Eid (Muslim end of Ramadan) or Hanukkah (Jewish Festival of Lights) to your relevant contacts

And don't forget that if you work for a company or organization to make the most of any 'corporate collateral' such as articles, case studies, press releases that you can use to forward on to relevant individuals.

Moving on from email and the internet what about using your phone? Getting into the habit of 'catch up calls' when you have a spare half an hour is a great way to keep up with your key contacts who you have not seen or spoken to for a while. While they may be too busy to call you most people appreciate a call with a "we haven't spoken for a while and I was wondering how things are going..." introduction. Even if all you do is leave them a message, you have made an effort which helps to go towards the principle of good networking: "Effective networkers build long-term relationships based on trust".

And finally think about how you can do some 'face-to face' networking that does not take up a lot of your time:

- Invite one or two contacts to an event that you are already planning to attend....it is an easy way to catch up with people without having to invest in a separate meeting, lunch or coffee

- If you are travelling think about who else you might want to meet up with in that location and see if they are free to meet: "I'm in your town/area/building on xxx day and was wondering if you had time for a quick chat/coffee?"

In both these instances even if the person says no you have still established contact and I often find that this can lead to a subsequent meeting or dialogue.

So in summary don't be put off by the thought that networking is too time-consuming for the working professional. Leverage the use of technology to make it quick and think about all the easy reasons you can find to keep in touch with your contacts.

About the book and the author:

*Since publishing *The Reluctant Networker* last year Neil gives inspirational talks on networking for organisations such as *The FT*, *The National Audit Office*, *Barclaycard*, *The IOD* and *INSEAD* as well as several professional services firms. He has appeared as a guest on *BBC Radio* and as a networking expert on *The Guardian's Live Q&A*. In addition to giving talks on networking Neil runs *mdj2 associates* a consulting firm working with clients on the *Retail* sector.*

See www.reluctantnetworker.com for more information. Copies can be purchased directly from the site or from Amazon and all other major online book stores as well as selected Waterstones stores.