



Podcast #048

Why bother with business networking?

Hi there listeners and welcome to the Marketing Menu podcast. Now you may have noticed we've been away for a little but we've been working on how we can keep our podcasts fresh and interesting for you.

All good stuff, Liz. Hi there listeners. And because of this, we've decided to make our podcasts shorter, more punchy, and to talk about things you really want to hear. So I guess it's getting back to some marketing basics, isn't it Liz? Making them short and sweet, and more actionable?

We're starting off today with that subject that a lot of people shy away from and that's networking.

Oh yes, so true.

When people first start up in business, they know they've got to go networking, but they're not really quite sure why.

Yes, I mean if you're starting out in business, it's the first place that you can start to interact with a potential new audience, isn't it?

And I think also for me it was about building confidence. Being seen in a place with other businesses was actually really quite important for me. So I felt like I was playing with the big boys.

I think confidence is an interesting point, actually Liz. I met somebody last week who came across, when you've got that 60 second what do you do and how do you do it, they came across very confidently, we were talking very eloquently about what they did, how they help people and how they seek to be a little bit unique. But talking to her afterwards, she said about how that had made her cringe inside, how she had been dreading it, and what surprised me, particularly she hadn't come across that as a tool. It was all very much in her head. I would say most people feel like that. In some respects, you have to get over yourself. Sometimes need to have a networking cloak that you put on, or that alter ego just for the period you there because people aren't going to know what you're feeling like or that you're trembling inside.

I think also everybody has to attend a networking meeting for the first time. They've all been in the same position, so nobody's there to judge, they'll totally empathise if you are feeling nervous and it's okay to say, I'm a bit nervous about this, I'm not quite sure what to say.

Absolutely. I often use that as an introduction to myself if I'm going to be seeing people I don't know. I always try to seek out the other people who look like they're floundering as well. There's nothing worse than seeing a sea of backs when you go into these places, particularly if they're all suited and booted, it makes

you even more intimidated. There's usually somebody in the room who is also looking around the room looking a bit lost, so I make a beeline for that person and say " Never been here before. Have you? How do you find it? Have you fat? How do you find it? Tell me a little bit about yourself. Remember those open questions?

That brings us on to a really good point. And now we're going to get into the nitty-gritty business. When you're choosing a networking group to go to, and there are going to be lots in your local area, be very clear about what you want to get out of the meeting. Now you may prefer a bigger meeting where there are lots of people and there's going to be lots of opportunities for you to talk to plenty of people or a smaller one might be more comfortable for you. It really depends on what your business is and how you are.

Yes, there'll be some that you have to become a member with, usually, they allow you to attend two or three meetings before that is a deciding factor. There will be others which we call referral groups, which tend to be more where you refer business to one another, your personal choice as to whether you like that sort of set up. There will be things like particular niche ones in the creative fields I can think of. And also women in business groups tend to be very popular if you're just starting out. Again, think about that and, as Liz says, what is your mission with that group.

And become regular.

Yes. Because that's what we're saying, once you've chosen those groups, you can't be everywhere. So choose perhaps two or three and then become a regular person to that because there's no point going for three months and then not turning up at all because people won't remember you.

Okay. So thinking about it in terms of what's in it for them, by which I mean coming up with a sentence that describes what it is you do and, how by working with you, it will be an advantage to them. So it's almost like your differentiator between yourself and perhaps one of your competitors on what the advantages and benefits of working with you will be.

And also once you've got a sentence in your head is much easier to remember. So if anybody asks you what you do, bang, you're straight there.

I rehearse in the car on the way there, just out loud.

Next is the all-important business cards. Now people often wonder about business cards.

Very important. must have, definitely. And use them to scribble. I think you've had a good point, you scribble on them, how you met them, what particular topics of conversation you might have had. Just so you've got that reference point when you get back to the office.

Which leads to our next point, which is follow up. Don't go to a business meeting and then just leave it at that. People who have given you their business cards, you've written on them; what they do, how you met them, maybe the date of the meeting, send them an email when you get home and say 'it was great to meet you. Do you fancy meeting for a coffee?'

Yes. Or particularly reference something that you talked about and maybe give them a little bit of a nugget or some further information, pop that in the email just to show that you were interested and you're following through rather than making it salesy.

Which leads to asking open questions. So it is a question of being prepared to go in and ask questions but also listen to the answers.

What do they say about the ears and the mouth?

You've got two ears, one mouth, use them in that proportion.

So, our top three tips from today's podcast on networking are: choose your networking group carefully and become a regular, have your juicy intro prepared and memorised for your own comfort. And don't forget to follow up after you've been to the meeting with any business cards that you've taken in.

So, everybody, that's today's podcast, we hope that that helps and let us know how you get on. That would be great.

Until the next time, it's goodbye from me, Liz Gordon.

And goodbye from me, Nicky Matthews.