



# The 12 Steps to Becoming a Master Networker

*... because cold calls aren't any fun*

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## Introduction

When I first began to write, it was on [NetWorks! Boise](#). Later, as my business began to morph, this site was repurposed to supporting our leads group and my writing focus was redirected to [Adaptive Business Services](#). I decided to mix it up again!

Since NetWorks! Boise is the home for our professional networking group, and as we strongly believe in all forms of networking ... I wanted to start a new educational series toward maximizing that goal. At the same time, these articles would become a foundation for training sessions for our current and future members. Now these articles will also become the basis for this eBook.

I've written down 12 steps that I feel are important and those will become the topic of individual chapters. The 12-step format is used for many addiction programs and being an effective networker is **addicting** (in a good way!).

I want to answer the “*why*” behind the goal of becoming a Master Networker. I started my B2B selling career in 1977 and our program was pretty simple ... make 30 face-to-face cold calls every day. I did that, knocking on the doors of Los Angeles businesses, while selling commercial grade calculating equipment.

Well, I'm here to tell you ... making cold calls in the heat of summer in a three-piece wool suit and a tie, day in and day out ... ain't much fun. It worked, but not that well. Still, back then ... whatcha' gonna' do? At least today we have options.



The obvious biggest difference is that today we have the internet and smart tools. Mind you, social networking should be a part of your overall networking efforts, but it should never be 100% of said efforts. You still need to get nose-to-nose and toes-to-toes.

My first experience with professional networking actually happened in the early 90's when I investigated a national networking group's local opportunity. I left that informational meeting with much interest, but my interest was focused on creating a group on my own that would not be tied to any national organization.

As luck would have it, I met two local gals at that meeting, we struck up a friendship, and the three of us then went about and created a group. I've been a consistent networker since that day. My current group, NetWorks! Boise, opened in 2007.

Networking groups have fed me consistently throughout the years and they have yielded several million dollars in sales as a direct result of referrals and that is the magic word. Pays for a lot of dues. Would you rather make cold calls or follow-up on a referral? Even a warm call beats a cold call any day.

Let's finish up this introduction with a story. Actually, more of an epiphany. 2006 was an interesting year for me. I had left my last management job in 2005 and had taken some time off to get some personal issues under control.

In 2006 I was ready to go back to work, but I had no interest in management. I wanted to sell and



I wanted to do so as an independent contractor on a commission only basis. No expenses, no benefits, no draw. I did so with a local electric sign company. This was my background albeit in ownership and management positions.

I canvassed the city in search of opportunities. I had no strict territory, but I also had no accounts and I was not taking any company leads. In a few weeks I turned around and I had over 500 *possibilities*. I would next have to contact each one and qualify the opportunity. Instead ... I shredded the list. True story. I **really hate** cold calling.

I joined a leads group (it sucked, but I made it work) and then began a formalized program of developing *power partners*. We'll talk about these later. The long and the short is that I never made a cold call for the next five years and I was as busy as a one-legged man in an ass kicking contest. My close ratio exceeded 80%. Substantially.

Over the past several years, my appreciation and understanding of networking has certainly evolved and matured. Please stay tuned as each chapter will have actionable steps for you to take. Of course, whether or not you choose to do any of this is entirely up to you. #momoney



## Table of Contents

<a href="#">Target Personas</a>	5
<a href="#">Budgets</a>	11
<a href="#">Find Opportunities</a>	15
<a href="#">Create Currency</a>	21
<a href="#">R.U.M.</a>	25
<a href="#">R.U.M. Part II</a>	29
<a href="#">Fundamentals</a>	33
<a href="#">Becoming Active</a>	37
<a href="#">Engaging</a>	41
<a href="#">Power Partners</a>	46
<a href="#">Activity Tracking</a>	50
<a href="#">Onward!</a>	53
<a href="#">About the Author</a>	57



# 1 Define your networking opportunities.

Creating target personas will allow you to properly identify your best opportunities. I would suggest that you will want to create three ...

Buyer/Market

+

Power Partners

+

Opportunity

## Target Personas

It's been said that it's going to be difficult to get where you are going without some sort of map to plot out your course. The same can be said for selling and networking. In fact, you will have multiple maps that together should be used to create a part of your sales process.

Today we are going to focus on the creation of *Target Personas* and I am going to suggest that you will want to create three ...

1. **Your Target Buyer/Market Persona** - What does your best buyer look like and where will you find them? This will help you do identify your best sales opportunities and you are going to want to network with those who share this common target market.



2. **Your Target Power Partner Persona** - That's what I call these folks, but I have heard others refer to them as *strategic alliances*. These people are from non-competing industries who will most likely refer you to potential business since they are folks who call on your same target buyers and markets.
  
3. **Your Target Networking Opportunity** - There are plenty of meetings and events out there, but you will want to set certain criteria that will allow you to narrow your search.

You will also be establishing search criteria that, among other things, can be applied to many social networks including LinkedIn.

### **Start by thinking about your best customers**

We seek to replicate proven success, therefore, think of your best customers. What makes them that? What might they have in common? Can we clone them? Our goal is to discover who has the best chance of actually doing business with me or referring business to me. Who do I want to work with and who am I capable of handling?

### **Develop your target buyer/market persona**

Assess, and really consider, the value of each of these segments. If one or more of these areas is not important to you ... discard them. Remember, you are attempting to map your ideal customer and your ideal opportunity!



- Location - Do you wish to provide your products or services locally, regionally, nationally, or internationally? Where will you not go?
- Previous engagements and relationships are a huge plus providing that they have been positive. The same can be held true if, for example, you have common connections.
- Influence and reputation - A high level of influence will be beneficial providing that this person is willing to share their knowledge, and their connections, with you. Think introductions and referrals.
- Type of business - Your product or service may be industry specific. If it is not, what industries best match your buyer profiles? Your services may fit better in a B2B environment rather than B2C or ... you might reverse that order.
- Company size - Size can be defined by: employees, revenues, locations, and many other factors. What sized company is most likely to invest in your services?
- Titles - My ideal candidates, based on company size, will have one of the following titles: Sales Manager or Sales Director or V.P. Sales or President or Owner or G.M.
- Life-time business potential - You will need to gauge this potential for your prospective customers.
- A willingness to refer - Your existing customers should be your best source for referrals. Are they? If not ... why? Have you ever even asked them for referrals? Good referrals are like sales gold, but if you think for one minute that your customers spend any time at all thinking about sending you referrals, particularly when you are not visible ... wake up!





- Keywords in their social profiles - Can you identify and discover commonalities that fit your persona? Start with your existing customer sampling.
- Their specific areas of need that you are able to satisfy - No pain = no sale. No need = no sale.

You will also likely want to mark certain criteria as being non-negotiables. These are the areas that will kill any opportunity regardless of what everything else tells you and ... you are going to have to be ruthless in enforcing this.

Next, we need to create the same kind of criteria lists for our target power partners and our target networking opportunities. Here are a few criteria for each to get you rolling ...

### **Target Power Partner Persona**

- Industry - What industries have the potential to be your best power partners?
- Reputation - I can't speak for you, but I want to work with the best. How will you determine this?
- Willingness to collaborate and refer – Ask them!
- What can you bring to them if not referrals?



That last one can be a bit tricky. I think of salespeople (or anybody who is charged with securing new business) as either being *top-feeders* or *bottom-feeders*. There is no insult involved. Top-feeders get involved in deals **very early** and, as such, are highly valued by bottom-feeders who want to get in early, but who typically do not.

The challenge is for a bottom-feeder to provide leads and referrals to a top-feeder. If you normally get involved in an opportunity later on, that will be too late for the top-feeder. What to do? You will need to be creative in providing value.

### Target Networking Opportunity Persona

- Format? Is this a closed meeting or an open event?
- How often and when do they meet?
- Do the other members share my same general market (B2B or B2C)?
- What types of leads and referrals do they share? What is important to you? Referrals, business intelligence, warm leads, camaraderie?
- Is my industry classification open and will it be protected?
- Will I find my identified power partners here?
- What are the requirements in terms of my investment of time and money?



Please note that, these three personas together will provide you with the very foundation that is needed in order to become a master networker!





## 2 Establish your budgets.

Everyone wants to receive a return on their investments (R.O.I) and remember that your networking activities should be considered as an investment rather than an expense! How much should you / can you invest?

### Budgets

In the previous chapter we created three target personas that will be used to help us to identify our ideal opportunities. They were: **Target Buyer**, **Target Power Partner**, and **Target Networking Opportunity**.

Now we want to establish a budget in terms of time and dollars that we will be willing to *invest* in networking activities. Note that I said **invest** and not **spend**. Any successful networking opportunity will deliver returns in excess of your investment. If it does not, find one/some that will.

While we might mention different types of networking activities, we are not here to discuss those now. We definitely will in our next chapter and will do so in depth! Not all *networking opportunities* are created equally.



I'm one of those people who are keenly aware that there is *selling time*, when you see customers and prospects, and *non-selling time*, before and after work when you can do paperwork. Networking is a prospecting activity that should be engaged in during both times.

So, let's start with **time** and we can look at this a couple of different ways:

- Time slot - Morning, afternoon, evening
- Frequency - Weekly, monthly, occasionally

Networking groups will generally meet for breakfast or lunch. Most, but not all, are weekly. My guess is that few will meet on Fridays and Mondays. You could do six networking groups weekly (three breakfast and three lunch), but can you be a quality giver in multiple leads groups? Two ... maybe. Six? Fuggetaboutit. I'm not sure that you would be able to keep anything straight.

Now, if leads groups are good for breakfast and lunch, and let's say that those are weekly, there might be some other functions that will meet monthly during those times. Do you want to leave time open for those? How about evening events such as *Business After Hours* at the Chamber of Commerce(s)?

We will also want to leave some time available for social networking (LinkedIn, Facebook, etc.). The nice part about social networking is that much of it can be done during non-selling hours. Certainly, that is when I would be doing the heavy lifting in terms of laying my foundations.



Honestly, as much as I love and believe on networking, I am not about to fill my days and evenings with nothing but this activity. If we look at this as a part of our prospecting process, and it is, we still need to leave time available for actually seeing and selling to customers, not to mention follow-up and paperwork.

Next, we will need some sort of a budget starting out. Let me be very clear about one thing. You often have to spend money to make money and if you bypass a great business-building opportunity because you can't see the difference between an expense and an investment ... I feel sorry for you. I also can't help you. If the difference is not obvious ... I'll leave it at that.

Still, it's simple math. The average straight commission rep makes 10% on a sale so that means if I invest \$5,000 annually on networking activities, I'm going to have to sell a minimum of \$50,000 in order to pay for that. Round numbers ... \$4,000 per month.

What is your average sale? I've been in a lot of different B2B industries and I can tell you that \$4,000 would be on the very low side of a sale for any of those industries. If you can't make one extra sale per month as a result of a concentrated networking activity ... wrong activity or you are going to have to look in the mirror and we will talk about this in a future chapter.

Here's the good news in terms of your budgets for time and money. With one good weekly leads group and some quality power partner relationships, I was able to keep my pipeline very very full with quality opportunities. It was extremely rare for me to network outside of those areas. The secret is **quality vs quantity**.



\$5,000 per year can buy you **a lot of networking!** You should be able to do well with an investment of well under 50% of that figure. This leaves plenty of money for taking important power partners to lunch (if that is a part of your program) and also for other awesome events.

Furthermore, if you eat breakfast or lunch out, have a fondness for specialty coffee, or enjoy tasty adult beverages ... you are already spending that and more ... without the ROI. Are you willing to invest \$200 and 20 hours per month toward networking? If not, what are you willing to invest? Stay tuned because, next we will be discussing where to make those investments!



## 3 Evaluate your opportunities.

There is a wide assortment of networking opportunities. You need to evaluate each based on commitments of time and money as well as a realistic expected return.



### Find Opportunities

There are a number of different networking opportunities out there so let's talk about some of the most common and give each some pros and cons. Before that, we will start with this general statement. The best opportunities for you will be found in the same places that match your target personas. Different personas may yield different results.

This is **critical** ... any attempt to do business with any other member of **any** of these networking opportunities should only occur once a relationship to do so has been established. These opportunities are earned. They are not given and they are not entitlements.

It is also only fair to say, and we will discuss this in depth later, that any results will be in direct proportion to your efforts. Certainly, some activities are designed to yield higher returns, but I





have personally achieved great results from some really terrible organizations while I have also seen people fail miserably in desirable settings as a direct result of their lack of effort.

A few options ...

**Leads groups** - *Weekly (frequency)* - NetWorks! Boise is a traditional networking, or leads, group that is entirely focused on generating business opportunities for its members. The strength of groups like this is found in the membership and whether or not your fellow members share your marketplace, goals, and target personas.

While these types of groups hold the potential for the highest returns, they also require the most effort. They should also be fertile grounds for potential power partners. They are generally not well designed for those who offer a product or service to a narrow market (geographic or industry).

Leads groups will also likely be the **only** activity that will only allow one member per industry classification. These groups may be professionally run, as a business (local, regional, national, or international), or they may also be run by the members themselves. A simple Google search will direct you to local organizations.

**Power partners** - *24/7* - Every bit as powerful as leads groups are power partners. Better yet, power partner relationships should be an integral subset of every leads group or ... you are in the wrong group. For that matter, they can/should be an integral part of **any group activity**.



Power partners hold the potential for huge levels of ROI while being some of the more challenging relationships to manage. It requires two partners who are committed to equal efforts and both must receive an equal ROI. However, how that ROI is defined will be up to that individual and it may differ substantially from the other partner.

**Self-improvement groups** - *Weekly* - Mastermind and Toastmasters would be good examples of these types of groups. Please keep in mind that these groups will have very specific goals that may or may not include building each other's businesses. In fact, that type of direct activity may be frowned upon and perhaps even ... severely.

However, common interests are excellent foundations for personal relationships which will often lead to business relationships. Just take things slowly. Now, if you have any sort of fear of talking in front of a crowd ... Toastmasters is awesome!

**Service groups** - *Weekly* - Think Rotary, Optimists, and Lions. Great groups and a great way to give back to the community. While their focus would be different from self-improvement groups ... the same rules regarding doing business will generally apply.

**Chambers of Commerce** - *Monthly* - This includes Business after Hours events and the Boise Chamber also has their own separate leads groups called T.I.P.s although you may need to be a chamber member to participate in these. While these are business-focused networking organizations, I call them "passive networking".



You are there to do business with each other, but I have rarely seen any overt effort to accomplish that or to refer members to business opportunities with others. Best advice ... be active and join committees to gain visibility. It is very easy to get lost (unnoticed) in groups of this size.

**Trade Associations** - *Monthly* - These types of groups are generally comprised of companies and their employees from a specific industry and maybe vendors who support that industry. Member education is a common theme. Examples might include [Building Owners and Managers Association \(BOMA\)](#) and the [American Institute of Architects \(AIA\)](#).

So ...how does the concept of *friendly competitors* sound? It's actually not that farfetched as many industries tend to specialize. For example, I might be an attorney who does nothing but wills. In this case, an attorney that does nothing except for business transactions might be a synergistic vs. conflicting relationship. In fact, these kinds of synergies can be found in any networking activity.

**Social networking** - *24/7* - Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn. These are the big three, but there are certainly many more. Sites like [Taloo](#) (local to Boise), [Refer.com](#) (founded in Boise), [Alignable](#), and [Shapr](#) are four web-based applications that are specifically designed for business networking referrals and leads.

Of course, one of the biggest draws of social networking is that it can be conducted at virtually any time. Additionally, your reach to new markets and potential partners increases exponentially



and it can run by itself 24/7 in the background. Social networking attracts buyers. It is your inbound marketing tool.

However, letting it just sit there without being active, in the right way, is a major mistake that will cost you business. While social networking excels at opportunity discovery, you will maximize your chances for success by developing relationships *in real life*.

**Other networking** - *Varies* - These would include things like business social clubs and even business leagues that might be similar to your local Chamber of Commerce. Hey, it's all networking and all networking has value.

What to do? It's time to make some choices. I suppose that you could try to do it all, but you would probably drop dead from exhaustion before any meaningful returns were realized. While I certainly cannot make these choices for you, I might suggest ...

1. One awesome leads group that meets weekly.
2. Five great power partner relationships.
3. One weekly service or self-improvement group.
4. A concentrated effort on one or two web-based networking platforms **only**. Pick based on your target personas. For B2B ... LinkedIn should be one.



This will give you two weekly commitments (you might pick one for breakfast and one for lunch), power partners that can meet with you at any time (coffee, lunch, tasty adult beverage) and a social networking program that can be largely managed off hours. Speaking of *managed* ... these levels are *manageable* in terms of your investment of both time and dollars.

Remember that you are going to have to make **unique** contributions to each organization that you participate in. Never share the same lead with people who compete with each other and nor should you take a lead given to you and share it with others! At NetWorks! bringing leads from another group is not tolerated and sharing our leads with another group is a neutering offense!



# Create networking currency.

4

Always remember that *givers get*. If you want to **earn** leads and referrals you are going to have to give those first. Your *currency* can come in many forms!

Leads + Referrals + Introductions + Promotion

## Create Currency

Let's start with the basic premise that, in order to become a master networker, you are going to have to have leads to share. Leads, referrals, and introductions are *networking currency and givers do get*. While not all leads are created equally, there are three criteria that will turn any o.k. lead into a potentially great lead ...

1. The information is not widely known. You are giving it out early. It was not found in the newspaper, on a website, or somewhere else. This is an exclusive.
2. You have the correct contact information including key contact name, phone, and email address.
3. There is no such thing as **too much** information.



In terms of lead types ...

1. Business intelligence leads can be valuable to a wide variety of partners. When a new business is opening up, moving, adding on, shrinking, or even closing they need a lot of different services. Don't worry about whether or not business intelligence leads will be of value for any one networking partner. They will figure it out.
2. Referrals and introductions are specific for one or more partners and are unique for each partner. There is an identified need for their specific service (referral) or a potential need for their specific service (introduction).

Now, if you want to continue to receive *insider information*, you must respect the anonymity of the giver. This means that, unless you have their express permission, you ...

- Never use a giver's name.
- Never share the source of the lead.
- Never share that lead with others.
- If backed into a corner regarding the source, you either *off* yourself first or, perhaps a better choice ... "*I read about it in tea leaves*"



Next, where will you find leads to share? But first ... prepare yourself to record whatever you run across because, if you rely strictly on your memory, it ain't gonna' work. Write it down, record a note on your phone ... whatever.

- Keep your eyes open! Is dirt being moved? Any sign of construction (including tenant improvements)?
- News sources can be good, but everybody probably sees those. Therefore, if that is what you have, enhance the lead with further info like contact names, phone numbers, and email addresses.
- City permit websites are free while other similar sources might be paid or require memberships - [AGC](#) (Association of General Contractors), [Dodge Reports](#), and [Construction Monitor](#). A new local *freemium* site that is quite good is [BoiseDev.com](#).

There is also in-person and online social networking, but ... if this is a formal networking organization with a membership of which you are a part ... you never share another member's leads without their permission!

**In-person networking events and trade associations** - These fall under the *eyes and ears* category so keep yours open.





**Online social networking** - The first thing to consider regarding online sites is that you want to go where your customers are found. This is true from the standpoint of finding opportunities as well as potential power partners.

If you are B2B, this is probably going to be LinkedIn. If B2C ... Facebook, Instagram, or maybe even Pinterest. Twitter? Twitter is the wild wild west so pretty much anything and anyone goes.

Here's the thing about social networking. Early on, I was advised that, in order to be successful online, you need to be open, transparent, and honest. While this is fundamentally true, some people chose to add *stupid* to the list.

As a result, people will talk about **anything and everything** and all you need to do is shut up and soak it all in. Buy your sponges in bulk at Costco cause ... you're gonna' need 'em. Furthermore, your discussions must be appropriate for that network. No one on LinkedIn wants to hear about your kittens, grandkids, or political affiliation. Particularly the latter.

**Online networking provides for additional forms of currency!** Promote others on social sites and also like, comment, and share forward their updates. Write recommendations. These folks will be notified of your thoughtful gestures!





## 5 Are you R.U.M.?

In order to be successful, you have to be R.U.M. Remarkable, Unique, and Memorable. People who are R.U.M. stand out from the crowd and are those people who earn referrals. Caution! You will be judged based on your actions!

### R.U.M

One of the most basic tenets of networking is that you are going to have to figure out ways to stand out in a crowd. The bigger the group, the bigger the challenge and. speaking of **large groups**, how about the internet and social networks? Very crowded! You need to be ...

### R.U.M. - Remarkable, Unique, Memorable

It's not magic ...

- Where everybody practices bad behavior, you don't. You are **remarkable**.
- What everybody else does, you don't. You are **unique**.



- When they think about the best person for their needs, they think about you. You are **memorable**.

You stand out because you are perceived as being different from your competition and in a good way! You are R.U.M.

There is even more good news when it comes to your competition. If you don't think that the bar to leap over them has been set low ... think of yourself as the buyer, the consumer. When was the last time that a salesperson or a company exceeded your expectations? How about never or close to it!

There are only three possible outcomes from any customer interaction. What are they?

- Did not meet expectations - you are toast, burnt.
- Met expectations - you are corn, canned.
- Exceeded expectations - you are prime rib, medium rare.

Let's say that you win that sale regardless of your best efforts to lose it. You made the sale, but ... *you don't have a customer that will buy from you again, without getting bids, and the one who will willingly refer you to others.*



You were probably low bid and there ain't no honor in being low bid. I can teach a monkey to sell low bid. Even worse, this sale gets you nothing more than this sale. Every sale going forward will be new business and starting from scratch.

You have met expectations which, at best, is a neutral experience that is not all that different than ... canned corn. I always get what I expect from ... canned corn. Maybe all you were was just the lesser of multiple evils.

## Referrals

You have two best sources for referrals. What are they?

- Existing customers
- Power partners including networking

How are referrals earned?

- Referrals are earned based on observable behaviors. What I see in terms of your observable behaviors are the same behaviors that I assume you will display with others including .... those that I refer you to.
- When I refer, my neck is on the block. My ability to refer increases my value with the customer, but ... I have to be sure that there is zero risk in doing so.



You also have to remember that **givers get!** How can you support, what can you do for, existing customers, power partners, and networking relationships? What do you have to give? Takers don't stay long in the game.

You are going to need to teach others how to give you a great referral, but first you need to know what one looks like.

- *“I gave your name to a guy and he should be calling you” is **NOT** a good referral.*
- *“I was talking to Jenny Smith over at ABC Company and she expressed an interest in the kind of services that you offer so I told her that I would have you call her. Jenny’s phone number is 867-5309 and her email address is jennyivegotyournumber@tutone.com and please feel free to tell her that I told you to call” **IS** a good referral!*

Therefore, when you give a referral, make it a good one. When talking to a referral partner, be sure to tell them how you plan to give them referrals (I will include ...) and ask them to please try to do the same for you.



## 6 Becoming R.U.M.

It's not that hard! Think of the characteristics that you admire in others. Remember that your goal is to separate yourself (in a good way) from your competition!



### R.U.M. Part II

What are some of the traits that you admire or respect in other salespeople?

- Humor – Relax! There is absolutely no reason why we can't have a little fun!
- Manners – Make liberal use of please and thank you and always show respect. Put your phone away!
- Honesty is a big part of this - Your word is your bond.
- Rapport – The correct amount of chit-chat is always important and this correct amount is dictated by the customer. You need to be able to read that. You need to be able to mirror your prospects.

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- Do your due diligence! Be prepared - This is one area where the social networks (and the web in general) can be invaluable as a research resource.
- Personalize your approach - Automation has created lazy people and, as a result, everything is mass marketed and nothing is personalized. You can change that!
- Educate vs. sell - Establish yourself as the authority.
- Attract vs interrupt - Your social profiles and social activity are designed to attract others to your services. They are your inbound selling tools.
- There is a difference between being assertive and being aggressive – Be non-threatening while still displaying confidence. Being diplomatic helps. Cushioning, providing reasons before asking tough questions or having to deliver unwanted answers, is a powerful technique!
- Always display urgency and responsiveness – Being on time is late. Replying the next day ... is late. Don't be late. Do you want to be viewed as unique, remarkable, and memorable? Start here. When was the last time you heard ...? *“He/she is a great salesperson, but they are just too damn responsive.”?*
- Be Proactive - The absolute last thing that you want to see happen is for the customer to contact you to check on the status of anything. They have been thinking about it for some time prior to reaching out and, when they are thinking about these kind of things ... it's never good for you.



- Mix it up! Don't be predictable - You have a lot of different tools in your toolbox so why is it that the only tool you use is a hammer? Additionally, you pop up at the least expected times with unexpected items of value.
- Practice clear communication - With other team members as well as with clients.
- Listen - Take notes. Recap. Clarify and confirm.
- Never be afraid to tell them "no" – This includes when it is in their best interest or when it just can't be done. You are also not afraid to tell them that "I don't know". This makes you human and it also means that you will always have a reason to go back, even if it is to answer a question.
- Organization - Always stay ahead! Be aware of selling vs non-selling time. Selling time is for being in front of a customer. Non-selling time is for prep and paperwork.
- Set clear expectations - Let them know what will happen and when and how and also makes it clear what parts they have to play in order to keep things on track!
- Under promise and over deliver – As a general rule, however much time I am going to tell you that it will take for me to do "x", is going to allow me enough time to make that date even in the event of ... unplanned open-heart surgery. Whatever I agree to give you, in return for your business, I will give you more.

The bottom line is that R.U.M. salespeople will consistently exceed customer expectations and, as a result ...





1. Your sales ratios will increase.
2. You will attract better prospects as your reputation becomes more established and recognized.
3. Referrals and repeat business, from all sources, will increase dramatically.

Note that each of the above will directly support the other two. As an example, referrals, repeat business, and better prospects will ALWAYS result in higher closing ratios. Simple.



# Work on the fundamentals.

# 7

Being a great networker is not magic, but it will require work. The good news, anyone can be successful and this includes folks who might be introverted. Start with ...

Show up!

+

Listen

+

Be prepared

+

Refer

## Fundamentals

Now that we have discussed some of the qualities that will help you to become a master networker, what about some actions? What will it take to become successful in any networking activity?

Let's focus on some fundamentals ...

**You don't have to be a mad extrovert to be a successful networker** - I am largely introverted.

I can appear to be extroverted when needed, but only to a limited degree and not in every situation. I work best in smaller venues and I will avoid larger gatherings like the plague.



Oddly, I am comfortable **in front of** large crowds, but **not in one**. As there are a ton of suitable networking opportunities out there, avoiding large venues becomes a non-issue.

**Take it slow** - Wherever you are, be sure to take your time to get settled in. You must get to know people before approaching them. More importantly, they need to become comfortable with you.

I once joined a group and on the day of our first meeting, a member who was not in attendance called me on the phone and suggested that we exchange our email lists. All of them. Uh ... no. It don't work that way.

**Show up** - You have to be active and be consistent. Only an idiot would make a monetary investment in any networking activity and then not make the necessary time investment in order to realize a return. It just makes no sense and it is an opportunity that has been fully squandered.

**Learn to listen** - People who are the most successful are those who genuinely show more interest in learning about others than they do talking about themselves. This is the time when the old adage ... *God gave you two eyes, two ears, and one mouth for a reason* ... carries absolute weight.

**Do your homework** - Performing your due diligence before reaching out is important. I expect people to do some research on me before getting in touch, with social networking and the internet in general, it's not like it takes a lot of effort.



If you don't, I may view it as being rather insulting and especially if your assumptions about me are blatantly in error. On the other hand, if you do, I'll be pleasantly surprised. You might even become R.U.M.

**Refer others before asking for referrals** - Remember that givers get. Practice giving quality referrals and introductions to others. You probably want to know **who, what, when, where, why and how** and people you refer will want to know the same.

**Then teach others how to refer you** - One of the most important steps to first take is to take advantage of opportunities to let people know who you are and what your offered value proposition is. You are going to be hard to refer if folks have no idea as to what the heck you do.

When presented with a general opportunity, contact the giver for more info and ask ... *"Do you have more info and can I use your name?"*. By the way, this simple action is a powerful way to build one-on-one relationships. Speaking of ...

**One-on-ones** - Meet with others one-on-one and outside of the group setting. It's a funny dynamic that is also critically important with power partners. When I was in the sign business, I had some extremely powerful power partner relationships.

These people loved me as much as I love them, but much to my surprise, they did not spend their days thinking ... *"How can I best take care of Craig??"* However, when Craig was buying lunch it was *"What can we bring!?"*



Next will be exploring this topic further as we dig deeper into group sizes as well as individual relationships.





## 8 Real life vs. social networking.

Social networking is a wonderful tool, but it does not replace getting nose-to-nose and toes-to-toes. Your goal in any networking opportunity is to develop relationships and, more often than not, that means taking things to real life!

### Becoming Active

Dependent on a variety of factors, the dynamics of effective networking can substantially change. At the very least, certain behaviors will become more critical based upon these variables including whether we are operating within a small or large group setting, engaging one-on-one, or we are actively networking online.

Let's start with the finish. Regardless of the setting, your one goal is to always develop one-on-one relationships, in real-life, with the right people. The goal in social networking is to move new relationships to some sort of a real-life status (face-to-face, phone, Skype). There are no exceptions.

Here is another cold hard rule. Relationships, and the benefits of a relationship (referrals and introductions) are **earned not given**. They are **not** a right and they are **not** an entitlement.



Treating any sort of a relationship in any different manner is a guaranteed formula for total failure and you will likely develop a reputation that you will not want to have following you around.

With a large group, your two biggest challenges are becoming visible and discovering who you should be attempting to get close to. This can sometimes be a challenge. A chamber of commerce business after hours event might be a great example and, if you are new to that organization, walking into that room could be intimidating.

Arriving early is the best way to minimize the masses. Now, these kinds of events tend to be cliquey and you will see these groups forming right away. Certainly, barging into the middle of a group during a conversation is bad form and ill-advised. Rather, hang back and determine whether or not you have something to contribute to the conversation and, if not, graciously move on the next gaggle.

Now, I will avoid these kinds of settings at all costs. As previously stated, while I am very comfortable being **in front of** a crowd of any size, I have an inherent fear of being **in one**. A better route for me (and maybe for you regardless) with a large group is to join a key committee and become active that way.

Maybe even the *new member welcoming committee* (my first choice). You will have great exposure and you will be the first to meet new folks when they join up. Smaller groups are certainly more intimate and, for me, less intimidating.



They may or may not have committees dependent on size. They will more likely have leadership positions and I would encourage you to step up to the plate on those at the appropriate time. Unlike a large group where it is very easy to go totally unnoticed ... in a small group, everything that you do will be fully noticed.

Your reputation will be quickly established. Arrive early rather than late. Attend as many meetings as possible. Help others before asking for help. Contribute. Your observable behaviors will be the **only** thing that other members have to go on when they entertain sticking their necks out by referring you to one of their good clients!

In these types of settings, it is **critical** to develop one-on-one relationships with other group members and this means meeting with them outside of the group setting for a hot coffee or a cold drink. Start with your identified *power partners* (those members who may be calling on the same decision makers and/or industries as you do) and then move on from there.

This brings us to social networking (Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.). Social has several inherent advantages ...

- The *reach*, the number of folks that you can connect with, is phenomenal.
- Your activity can be conducted **at any time** and from your desk or mobile devices.
- Search routines will allow you to quickly discover potential networking partners.
- Social is awesome for research and pre-call due diligence.





On the other hand ...

- It is **CROWDED** and it can be **VERY** difficult to stand out.
- Things move quickly and it is easy to get lost and lost in the crowd.
- It is largely impersonal.
- Attempts to communicate directly can be easily overlooked, purposely ignored, or outright rejected.

While social networking presents a tremendous upside, it is also a sophisticated minefield that must be navigated effectively and we will discuss a few tips to do so in our next chapter.



## 9 Practice progressive engagement.

Did you ask your spouse to get married before you even met? Take it slow by learning to engage progressively. The least you can do is buy me a drink before asking for my money :)



### Engaging

One goal in social networking is to connect with others, in a meaningful manner, and then to develop these relationships. Our primary goal should be to do this with the right people ... those who we can best assist with achieving their desired results and vice versa.

Twitter is fairly simple and straightforward. You follow somebody then see if they will return the favor. LinkedIn and Facebook require a more formal procedure of extending an invitation to connect or friend and then hoping that this is accepted.

Regardless of the social network, there are many steps that you can take to maximize your chances for a successful linking. We can effectively engage with people prior to any actual connection being realized.

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These can be baby steps which I call *taps* to more direct overtures which we will call *touches*. Both can, and should, be done in a progressive manner. We move from more casual activities and then onto those engagements which request an action in the form of a connection.

Speaking for myself, and particularly when I receive a template invitation from someone on LinkedIn who I don't recognize, the chances of me accepting that connection request are minimal unless ... I can associate this person with some form of prior engagement.

In a perfect world, this request is personalized and it will remind me of how, when, and where we may have engaged previously. Sending me one tweet, or liking my page on Facebook, and then asking me to connect, ain't exactly progressive and ... it ain't gonna' work.

Let's say that our ultimate goal is to connect on LinkedIn. How might we approach that? For our purposes, we will first assume that we are not connected. One of my major sub-goals will be to establish name recognition (my name) with this other person.

### ***Taps:***

- Look at their profile and don't do it anonymously. Just this simple act will be brought to this person's attention and your name, and your company name, will be mentioned.
- There is one place on LinkedIn where you can freely interact with others who are not connected with you by any level of degree ... groups. Here you can comment, like, share,



and start your own discussions. You can also *follow* people in groups which means that their updates from this specific group will appear in your newsfeed.

- Be active in group discussions. Every time you do your name, and your headline, will be visible to your other group members.
- Follow them on Twitter or on LinkedIn. If they follow back on Twitter, thank them with a PERSONALIZED direct message, or a reply message, that mentions their first name. This simple act is so rare that they will never forget you!!
- Reply to them or retweet one of their posts on Twitter. You don't even have to follow them for this to be effective.
- Favorite one of their tweets or add them to a Twitter list. More sophisticated users will see and appreciate these!
- Connect me to someone else or just mention me in a tweet (by my Twitter handle) and I will see it. Mention me in conjunction with sharing one of my articles from my website and I will want to marry you.

***Touches:***

- Direct message them on Twitter. You may even want to let them know that you are sending them a request to connect on LinkedIn and are hoping that they will accept.



- You can direct message any group members on LinkedIn. Nice and few people are aware of this!
- Some premium members on LinkedIn will accept direct messages from anybody (Open Link). This used to be easily discoverable by a badge (since discontinued), but now you will need to attempt a message. One of two things are going to happen ... it goes through or LinkedIn will try to sell you a premium membership.
- If you are a LinkedIn premium member with InMail privileges, you can private message ANYBODY on LinkedIn.

### ***Connecting:***

- Always, did I say ALWAYS, send a personalized invitation to connect (LinkedIn) and remind them of any previous engagements that you may have had and ... give them a reason to connect with you!
- If you cannot send them a personalized connection request, you can still message them to alert them of your intention. These can be done via any network, in some fashion, but should probably originate via the channel that the request is coming from.
- Are you aware that you can private message ANYONE on Facebook? Facebook does not offer personalized friending invitations so this would be a way for you to augment that.



**Don't stop now!** While you may have successfully connected, and you may have already invested some sweat equity to get to this point, why would you not carry this further? Why would you not wish to develop this relationship? If you don't take it to the next level, you have a *connection*. Nothing more and nothing less. What you do not have is a ***relationship***!

- Continue to use the taps and touches discussed previously and on all of the networks. You will now be able to like, comment, and share on any of their updates and they will be notified of when you do that.
- Endorse them or, if you really love them, skip the endorsement and write them a recommendation! I am on record as stating that I think that LinkedIn's endorsement feature is one step above being worthless, but when you endorse somebody they will be notified.
- If you endorse, make it sincere. If you have no personal knowledge that someone has this skill, why would you endorse them for it? I am regularly endorsed by people who I only know casually and often they are endorsing me for skills that I do not have, or they would have no idea that I have, or even for skills that I have to look up. Make it real!
- Now that you are connected, you can privately message them at any time.
- Provide valuable, and appropriate, updates on social networks and build your expertise in the process!

**Take your relationships to real life!**



## Develop *power partners*.

10

Power partners are other business people who offer services to the same people who you want to meet. Your services, for example, may both be construction related. These relationships are driven by direct referrals. Some elements ...

Refer + Meet + Reward + Leverage

### Power Partners

Let's talk a bit about *power partners*. Power partners are the secret sauce of the networking world. They can and should be a subset of every networking type group that you belong to and particularly in any leads group. They also function as a standalone networking resource. This is so **critical** I'll share, once again, the same true story that I touched on in the introduction.

In 2005 I resigned from my last management job. I had been in management positions, with a few short-term exceptions, continuously since 1979. I took about 6 months off to plan my next moves and came to the decision that I wanted to go back to selling only which was something that I had not done in a great deal of time. Additionally, I wanted to work on a commission only program.



Without a doubt, electric signage was my passion as an industry so this is the area that I went back to. New construction (my area of specialty and focus) was hot in Boise in 2006 and I set about to document every new commercial project that I could find in the area. I spent about 30 days of extensive windshield time.

Once I had gathered the information, I looked back at my list and I had something like 500 potential projects to pursue. This sheer number presented a problem as I had no idea as to which of these were actually opportunities and which were not due to any number of factors including perhaps having already pulled the trigger with another company.

I needed answers fast and even explored hiring somebody to make the calls and to try to determine any levels of interest. This meant training people for a one-off project and it also meant giving over a certain degree of control. Neither aspect was appealing, So, I did the only logical thing, I tore the list up. No exaggeration.

Instead, I immediately did two things. I joined a leads group. It was marginal at best, but I made it work. Geez, I sold a \$65,000 sign to another member who approached me with his project at my first meeting.

Next, I began to systematically contact every commercial realtor, architect, developer, and construction company who I had worked with previously on a signage project. These would be my power partners.





Power partners call on the same people who you might call on and who work in similar, yet non-competing, industries. They are in the unique position to introduce you to others who might need your services. These are at the very least warm calls and are more likely referrals. I have personally not made a true cold call since I went out on my own in 2006.

I also mentioned that power partners should be a subset of any leads group. As an example, in our group, NetWorks! Boise, we have a general contractor, a civil engineer, a solar contractor, a concrete services company, an electric sign company, and a company that specializes in construction materials and inspections. They constitute a *construction power partner subset*.

Another example might be an accountant, an attorney, a financial planner, a banker, and an HR consultant. This would comprise a *professional services power partner subset*. Additionally, one person could certainly belong to more than one subset. The possibilities are quite intriguing, but there are a couple of things that you must be aware of in order to maximize your results ...

1. This is a two-way street. You know what you want from other members, but what can you provide to them? This can become even more complex when you consider that some people in a group may need to be in front of an opportunity much earlier than other members will typically become even aware of such opportunities.
2. Your power partners will not spend every waking hour thinking about you. And nor will you of them. This means that you will want to create regular face-to-face interactions where you can build trust and relationships and formally exchange new opportunities. This could be weekly or, I would think at the very least, monthly.



3. Having multiple power partners from the same industry can be tricky. Who do you give this opportunity to? Same issue with more than one leads group, Now, you may have people who specialize in different markets (vertical, geographic, etc.). That can work. If it were me, I would determine that absolute best person for each industry and then look at expanding my number of service partners.

In the sign industry, I always considered myself to be a *bottom feeder* since I generally was brought into projects much later than my other partners. I asked them what other services I might provide them with and came up with a few of my own. Ultimately, and this surprised me initially, the response that I received was that ... *“We like referring signage to you because we never have to hear about it again from our customers.”*

Say what? What this really meant was that they had confidence that, once they referred someone to me, that client would be taken care of appropriately. More importantly, they had no fear that this referral would come back to bite them in the butt. At the same time, they were providing a professional service to their clients by making this recommendation. That's what. Makes sense.





## 11 Track your results.

You could guess about your results, but that is no way to run a business! You want to see a validated return and my suggestion is that, while you can do this on spreadsheets, you are going to want a good CRM!

### Activity Tracking

Speaking for myself, I am all about R.O.I., Return on Investment. As such, I look at my networking activities as investments rather than expenses. While I can tell you that I can credit millions of dollars in projects directly to my networking efforts, you are going to want and need to track your own results.

It's not difficult, there are only a few key metrics to monitor, and the tools to do so range from zero cost to whatever you want to spend. If this is the only thing that you want to track ... free is more than adequate.

However, if tracking your networking activities and results will be a subset of a more advanced CRM (Customer Relationship Management) application, you may want to spend a bit more. If you



already have a good CRM, you should be able to easily modify it to include networking activities and results.

In terms of specific tools, a simple spreadsheet will work. Someone using Trello, a free project management tool, has developed a [free networking tracker](#). Here is the [link to the actual template](#) that is used. Me, I like a CRM and you can get a good one for **100% free** from, as examples only, either [Zoho](#) or [HubSpot](#).

What do you want to track?

- Referrals given to who.
- Referrals received from who.
- Sales (who, what, how much) made as a result of a referral.
- The same as the result of a general lead.

Here is a suggested simple model for a CRM ...

- Networking partners become contacts. You can use tags to separate them however you like. This could be by what organization they belong to and/or their industry.
- Within the contact record you record any activities, and you can generally classify these, such as “referral given” or “referral received”.



- New opportunities from referrals are tracked within your CRM pipeline and these opportunities can generally be tagged by their “source”.
- You might want to also tag your contacts via an “A”, “B”, “C” system with “A” being those most likely to refer (or however you want to define it). There is also a “D” classification and “D” stands for “Delete”. If your system offers recurring *touch reminders*, “A” contacts should be engaged with on a higher frequency than “B” or “C”.
- “Sold” reports are then generated by source via the pipeline interface.

Now, match the results up against expenditures (dues, time, other expenses) and then make your own decisions. Not that difficult to do and your actions will be based on actual data vs. a perceived gut feeling.



## 12 Moving forward.

Becoming a Master Networker takes time. This is not a race, but you will need to keep moving forward! Remember that a referral, or even a warm call, beats a cold call any day!



### Onward!

Our final step in this series will be a little bit *recap* and a bit more for some additional tips ...

#### Starting out

Remember that this is not a race. You will need to get to know your fellow networkers, and earn their trust, prior to seeing any real returns in terms of referrals. Be visible, learn about others, and always remember that *givers get*. Nothing will sink you faster than trying to circumvent, expedite this process.

#### How much time is needed to see a return?

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How much time do you give an opportunity? Time is important, but effort is even more important. If you don't put in the effort ... no amount of time will be adequate. I would allow a year minimum and during that time you should be constantly evaluating your own effort. Are you doing everything that you can do to maximize your returns?

### **Taking it to the next level**

Most people that I know, and even those that I associate with in a networking capacity, are what I would call *passive networkers*. They show up, share a few leads, and will give out referrals when the chance to do so arises. Very few will follow-up on warm leads or seek to interact with others outside of a planned setting.

That's a shame because they are only receiving a fraction of the potential benefit from any networking relationship. They do just enough to get by. If that works for them ... who am I to say.

For those of you who are seeking the maximum return, and those of you who are willing to **work for it**, here are some tips ...

### **Effective networking does take work and no amount of pixie dust is going to change that -**

Your one overriding goal is to develop mutually beneficial relationships and these take time. Real relationships are also real-life and that means, that if it is at all possible, you need to get face-to-face. Ditch any device that *glows*.



**You can control the networking narrative** - I figured this out early on. I built a number of power partner relationships, but as previously stated, most networkers are passive. As such, as much as they might like me, they rarely thought about me unless ... I created an event that put us nose-to-nose. That event was called *lunch*.

**Show genuine interest in others** - I'll let you in on a little secret. I **absolutely hate** talking about myself which is good because ... rarely am I ever asked to do so. Rather, I spend my meetings having the other guy or gal tell me about themselves. Winner winner.

**What can you give others?** - This can sometimes be challenging and sometimes the best way to determine what value you can provide to a partner is to ask them straight out. Don't be surprised if you hear ... *"All I want is someone who I can count on to take care of my customers."* Being able to make quality referrals adds value to their, and your, services.

**How else can you leverage these relationships?** - Start by being proactive about your needs ... *"Do you know anyone at firm "x"? I see that you are connected on LinkedIn to "x", would you be comfortable in introducing us?"*

Speaking of referrals and introductions, teach others how to do both for you and ... you do the same for them! A solid introduction includes ... name, company name, contact info, nature of the referral, they are expecting your call, and use my name. These are minimums!





This concludes our 12-part series and I hope that you have found it to be beneficial. If you have any suggestions for future articles or if you would like to learn more about [NetWorks! Boise](#), please reach out to me at [craig@adaptive-business.com](mailto:craig@adaptive-business.com).

**See the accompanying slides and infographic!**

[Slides](#)

[Infographic](#)



## About the Author



Craig M. Jamieson is the managing member of Adaptive Business Services in Boise, Idaho and has owned and operated NetWorks! Boise Valley since 2007.

Craig has been in B2B sales since 1977 and, during that time, he has served in a variety of positions including sales manager, division sales manager, national sales manager, district manager, and business owner. He has taught salesmanship at the university level.

Craig is a [Nimble Social CRM Solution Partner](#), a [TTI Performance Systems](#) VAA, and he also provides training and consulting to businesses on how to leverage social selling tools, techniques, strategies, and Social CRM to increase their revenues.

Craig is the author of [“The Small Business’ Guide to Social CRM”](#), [“How to Build a For-Profit Networking Group”](#), and [“Focused Social Selling – less really is more”](#). He has been named as a Top 100 Influencer in Social Sales and his blog has been recognized as both one of the 44 Best Sales Blogs. Best 20 Blogs for B2B Sales, and many other awards.

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