

Professional networking advice for beginners

Ever heard the phrase 'It's not what you know, it's who you know?' Professional networking dispels this myth, as the purpose of professional networking is not only forging mutually beneficial relationships with other people in business, but also about sharing knowledge and expertise.

Professional networking can seem like a daunting two words if you haven't done it before, so we've shared our top tips for beginners. You'll soon find that using this incredibly fruitful business resource can be easy and even enjoyable, and it really can open a lot of doors.

A good place to start is to join your own Alumni Association professional network on LinkedIn.

1. Prepare an 'elevator pitch.'

Have an engaging and concise pitch prepared for your business, ready to use if anyone asks. Carry business cards – but don't just hand them out to everyone you come across as this can be seen as spammy. This also applies to your pitch as you should only use it when appropriate to the conversation.

2. Use social media and online networking

Social media is essential for modern day professional networking. It gives you access to a broad range of people and allows you to foster relationships in a more personal way as you get involved in regular discussions and can ask people directly for help.

3. Build your reputation in the community

Your aim should be to appear to be involved in the community and build a reputation for wanting to get involved and be helpful. Networking is about giving as well as taking. Attend conferences and open days, volunteer or even sponsor an award.

4. Be friendly, but not salesy

If you be yourself and are genuine, you'll find yourself getting much better results than if you just 'work the room.' Have proper conversations and talk to a few people, rather than everyone in the room. People will notice your schmoozing, and it can get annoying. Who knows, you may even make some lasting friendships.

5. Follow up and take notes

Remembering what people have said to you makes follow ups easier and more meaningful. People are more likely to remember you if you reference specific things you spoke about. It also shows you care.

6. Listen to others

Asking people for help and showing an interest in what they do, rather than just what they can do for you, is a quick and easy way to make friends in business. Take advantage of others' expertise - they'll appreciate the fact that you respect their opinion.

7. Enjoy yourself!

If you're relaxed and having a good time, it will show, and people will be more likely to want to engage with you. Remember, chances are other people in the room are slightly nervous about

approaching people too. If you just focus on having interesting conversations with like-minded people, the rest will follow.