

# The Speed Networking Experience

Speed networking is a growing trend among business professionals which is adding a punch to the everyday business agenda. Individuals and companies alike are taking advantage of this exploding trend and using it to grow professionally and socially. The concept is very much parallel to speed dating for matching people, making connections and developing relationships for the futures. Many professionals find speed networking as an effective tool for meeting a large volume of people in a short period of time. In any case, the advantages of this type of networking will have professionals choosing this style of communication over internet and online networking.

Listed below are key benefits of speed networking that professionals find attractive for meeting people and developing their social and professional networks.

## **Benefit #1: The Ice Breaker**

Speed networking is the ultimate ice breaker. In the initial meeting, each person is given a minute to describe themselves and their business. It is a great way for strangers to meet with almost no pressure or stress. The model of speed networking allows people to meet and chat for less than five minutes at time and switch over to meet new people. So there is no time for an awkward pause or speechless moment that can cause nervousness to both parties. The short amount of times gives each person a chance to say something fun, interesting and informative to liven up the conversation.

## **Benefit #2: The Exponential Component**

A speed networking session can last from approximately 40 minutes to an hour and a half. Within that time frame, participants can be expected to meet up to 50 potential business contacts. Being in contact with so many people can exponentially expand your current network. Even if you do not have similar business or social interests, participants at the event are able to connect you in with their friends, colleagues or clientele and vice versa. At that point, your circle can grow to infinite levels and degrees.

## **Benefit #3: The Professional Development**

Being able to articulate your business, company, profession, product or services in less than one minute will give you a clear advantage over your competition. Speed networking allows professionals to practice and perfect their 30 second elevator pitch. As you continue to repeat your speech and connect with people, you are also able to use the right words to make the right first impression which leads to the right referrals.

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## 9 Tips for Speed Networking

Have you ever been to a speed dating event? If you have you'll understand the concept of speed networking.

At a speed dating event you get to meet an awful lot of people in a very short space of time and the idea is that first impressions count, if you hit it off with someone and feel that you have things in common then you can meet up again later and take more time to build a relationship.

The positive points about speed networking are that you get the opportunity to meet and exchange business cards with a relatively large number of other business people and at the same time move on and eliminate the possibility of being stuck talking to the same person for a whole event.

For me, there must also be an informal networking session at the end of the event where you can take time to meet again with other people that you felt you were building a rapport with. In this way you can start the relationship building process rather than it just having finished with the exchange of a business card.

In these types of event it's vital to have mastered the art of effective use of business cards. When you finish a session you may well have a pile of cards and find it difficult to be able to put a face to the card at a later date. This is one reason why my business networking tips below are essential to making the most of speed networking and speed dating alike.

1. Before you decide to attend speed business networking events take time to understand the format. Is it all speed networking or is there free networking time too? If you understand the format you'll go better prepared and make more of the event.
2. Part of the above is about understanding how much time you have with every other person. If it's short then you really need to have a well practiced and fine tuned sixty second presentation. If you've got a bit longer you may afford to go a little more in depth.
3. You may be required to follow a set agenda in your meetings such as your name, your business sector etc. Knowing this in advance will help you practice the right subject matter prior to the event.
4. Speed networking, when there is a fixed agenda, is a very comfortable way to meet new people so take time to identify those people that you don't already know.
5. Don't be in too much of a hurry to give your pitch. Let the other person talk first and if there are any "common areas" that you want to exploit, you can then adapt your pitch to suit.
6. Make good use of business cards. When you exchange cards take time to read aloud what is on the other person's card. The other person will see this as interest on your part but most importantly, will help you remember the face and the name at a later date. You can also use the

business card to make notes. This is an important point when designing your own cards - make sure that the background is a light color so that anyone can make notes on your card.

7. Considering point 6 - don't forget your business cards and a pen!

8. Don't lose time searching through business cards to find your own. Make sure that you have a place for those that you have collected and for your own. I use two separate pockets in my jacket or coat.

9. Finally, if you feel you have something more to say to someone and that there could be a synergy - make it clear! Now is not the time for polite conversation, be direct and let them know that you would like to have a further meeting and propose a date and time.

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## **The Perfect (Elevator) Pitch**

**It's a skill every businessperson needs. How to create it, rehearse it, and tailor it for a specific audience**

One of the most important things a businessperson can do—especially an owner or someone who is involved in sales—is learn how to speak about their business to others. Being able to sum up unique aspects of your service or product in a way that excites others should be a fundamental skill. Yet many executives pay little attention to the continuing development of "the elevator pitch"—the quick, succinct summation of what your company makes or does.

That's too bad, because the elevator pitch—so named because it should last no longer than the average elevator ride—is far too important to take casually. It's one of the most effective methods available to reach new buyers and clients with a winning message. True, you may not actually be doing the pitching in an elevator, but even if your meeting is a planned, sit-down event, you should still be prepared to capture your audience's attention quickly.

### **Keep It Fresh**

Every business grows and changes, and your pitch needs to grow and change with it. You can have the most creative logo, the slickest slogan, the most dazzling brochures, and the most cutting-edge Web site, but if your elevator pitch is out of date, you're missing one of your most important opportunities to "brand."

You know your business better than anyone. How are you keeping abreast of the latest ideas? What continues to set you apart from your competition? How can you speak about your record of quality goods and services and make it relevant to your future plans?

As your audience's needs and expectations change, make sure you change the way you speak about your business. Your language, your approach, and what you choose to highlight for a particular audience has got to change over time.

For instance, what has worked in years past with print and broadcast audiences could bore an online audience to tears. You wouldn't think of not updating your other sales and marketing materials, so why would you let your elevator pitch grow stale?

Knowing your business, product, service, or issue well is one thing, but how do you convey excitement and spark interest to those outside your organization? What do you highlight? What do you leave out? And how do those choices change with your audience?

## **Always Be Prepared**

In the early days of my executive coaching firm, I'd worked out an elevator speech with three quick points about what set our training services apart. It was working well, and I'd gotten comfortable, perhaps too comfortable, with using it.

One day, I won a brief introduction to a client in an industry we hadn't trained in before. After my standard elevator speech (in a hallway this time), this decision-maker smiled and said: "Frankly, lowest cost isn't necessarily our highest priority. I'd need to know a lot more about how you might add value to our existing efforts at training, not just your cost—and you'd need to convince me your firm could handle something we don't already offer our type of demanding professional."

He disappeared before I could recover. I didn't have another chance with him for almost a full year. When that time came, I'd made sure to learn all I could about the training his company already had in place and the precise value we could add to existing efforts.

I'd already taken the lesson to heart: Adjust the pitch to the person who is listening, and refine it as you and your business continue to grow and change. It worked, and we've since been able to win that valuable account and many others in the same industry.

I've been on the other side of the less-than-perfect pitch, too. At a conference, a young businesswoman approached me to introduce herself and her Web-building services. She was eager and confident, but after a few minutes of hearing about her competitive pricing, her creativity, and a few of her clients, I said: "Well I hear from a lot of design services, and it's hard to tell the real differences between you. What do you think really sets your work apart for someone like me in a services industry?"

The question obviously caught her off-guard, and she admitted she didn't have an answer. An honest answer, but not a first impression that achieved her goal of getting a second meeting.

Continually perfecting the elevator pitch ensures that you are always able to put your best foot forward as your business grows and changes and your client base expands. Click [here](#) to view our slide show of tips for developing that "perfect pitch."

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## **Additional Tips:**

- Everyone matters because everyone can help
  - People's minds can be changed in seconds: If you can impact a piece of information about your organization that changes someone's mind, then you have accomplished something, or they walk away and thinking "I didn't know that".
  - Always carry a lot of business cards
  - Arrive early and stay late because there are hidden opportunities everywhere
  - You have to show up: The world is full of opportunities and you never know, nor can you ever predict, when a unique opportunity or something comes your way. Show up and you might learn something new.
  - Have a goal/objective when you attend the events
  - Write notes about things you talked or learned about the people you met
  - Have a firm handshake, smile and look at them in the eyes
  - Do thank you follow ups immediately
  - Listen twice as much as you talk
  - Dress appropriately
  - Do more of this and it will come easy for you
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- Ask for help from your networking: Don't hesitate to ask for assistance or get an introduction done. If you are looking for a job, get the word out! You will be surprised when the opportunity comes.

Source: <http://naaapseattle.blogspot.com>

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