



CONNECT, **NOT** collect!



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Connecting your enterprise to a flexible and optimised network isn't as easy as one might think. How do you evaluate network opportunity and risks, share best practices and identify strategic network transformational initiatives and their related value to your business?

The difficult part of networking is putting yourself in new situations and stretching your comfort zone to find the right networking methods – the backbone of effective business networking is the process of finding, building and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships.

By networking you are not only spreading the word about your business, you are investing in people. Be sure however, that you network with the right target market and remember networking is about building trust. Face-to-face networking is best – to my mind there is so much commerce going on in most social networking sites from Facebook to LinkedIn. Anyone who ignores social media networking in my opinion is making a grave mistake.

The old proverb "It's not what you know, but who you know" is so apt in the business-networking world – having connections is often more important than your skills or abilities. If you want a really successful business, then you need to have a great source of relevant connections in your network that

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you can call on when necessary. If you are trusted your credibility and good reputation aids your client acquisition, opportunities, support and resources. Networking isn't about shaking hands and discussing the weather, it's about looking for opportunities. To do this you need to have an opinion and ask pertinent questions so you are remembered for your skill and professionalism.

How much time should you invest in networking? There are many opportunities to network and expand your professional circle. However, some require payment and all cost time. You have to ask yourself if this something that is worth your time and is it targeting the right market? Networking is about connecting with people, not collecting people. It's a skill that you learn through experience.

It is crucial to nurture business networks once they are formed. Very few people put in place a methodical system for following up with contacts they have made at a networking event. Again, it is important to have a strategy for keeping in touch with contacts you meet. Remember networking is for mutual benefit. ■



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