



# Expose Yourself

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## Building a Solid Business Referral Network Through Shameless Self-Promotion

**Y**ou bought this book to become a better networker, right? Whether you are a business owner, salesperson, or employee in a company looking for a competitive edge, strong networking skills will open doors for you that no degree, certification, or award could. In today's relationship economy, success is not achieved by WHAT you know as much as it is through WHO you know.

The next three chapters discuss the core skills for becoming a good, solid networker. You'll learn how to approach your networking endeavors with purpose and planning so you can make the most of your time and your contacts. You'll learn how to define your target market. We'll also cover where to find the people you need to add to your network. You'll even learn why the Networking Gold Zone™ is the most important part of any networking event. Before you leave this section, you'll have a memorable sixty-second commercial.

Shameless self-promotion utilizes the best of marketing and public relations tools and places an emphasis on increasing your exposure through networking. What makes networking so powerful is that a good referral

from a trusted colleague can carry more weight than thousands of dollars spent on advertising. Just make a great impression on the people you meet and provide excellent care with the leads you receive, and you'll earn a place in the hearts and minds of the people you know.

If you want to become a great networker, you must commit to becoming more than just a shameless self-promoter. The next step is to turn your networking contacts into lifelong business relationships that will provide more clients, bigger paydays, and sweeter success. To make that happen, you'll need to become a student of communication, customer relations, and branding. The three sections that follow this section will help you do that. Don't be afraid to skip around in the book but above all, make sure you read the section on branding. It is one of the more important skills of all for the new millennium networker.

## CHAPTER 1

# Promotional Strategy

When you run a business today, you are really in the marketing business — regardless of what kind of product or service you sell. Even when you work inside a company and want to improve your visibility, you need to become an expert in marketing because you are in the business of marketing you! The concepts that you have available whether you are marketing your business or just marketing yourself are not that different. Think about it — when you open a store, you have to get the word out about your location, product selection, special offerings, and hours, right? When you are networking for upward mobility, you need to get the word out about your experience, expertise, desired next steps in your career, character, and work ethic. Circulating a résumé via e-mail can't do all that.

Since I started my first business in Dallas in 1992, I've been a student of marketing and publicity — I didn't have a choice. By default, I was the chief marketing officer. I became most fascinated by networking and have devoted years of research to it. Today, I'm considered an expert in the science of building a strong business referral network. However, I didn't realize for many years that I was a gifted connector like Malcolm Gladwell talks about in *The Tipping Point*. I was deathly shy, and I was perfectly happy working alone behind a computer. I didn't even LIKE meeting new people! How the heck was I ever going to overcome the shyness so I could become a successful entrepreneur? You needed to be good at sales and that meant being a social butterfly, right?

I chose to pursue a laser-focus commitment to learning to network because it was a gateway to prospects for my business. When you work for yourself and your survival matters, it's amazing what kind of adversity you can

overcome. I developed the skills and strategies for building a strong network of contacts. With that behind me, I was able to use my God-given talent for connecting to help my company and others in my network. I share my networking secrets in this book. You'll find they are relevant to whatever stage of life you are in.

Because I've learned that networking isn't enough to achieve promotional success quickly, I'm providing you a blended approach to exposing yourself that utilizes networking but also incorporates common street marketing and public relations tools.

## **Overview of Promotional Strategy for the Rest of Us**

People who specialize in marketing and public relations will tell you they are two completely different animals. To the rest of us, the lines become blurred. Our eyes glaze over when the pros talk about unique selling propositions, eyeballs, Four Ps, and Seven Ps. According to marketing guru and Harvard Business School Professor E. Jerome McCarthy, a marketing mix contained four elements: product, price, place, and promotion — the Four Ps. To the average person, marketing has come to mean simply promotion.

In this chapter, I'll focus on the use of promotional strategy instead — specifically shameless self-promotion. In marketing, promotion generally refers to the various methods of promoting the product, brand, or company through publicity, advertising, sales promotion, and personal selling. Shameless self-promotion uses all those with an emphasis on increasing exposure through networking.

As you become busier because all your networking efforts are paying off, you'll need to complement them with advertising and sales promotion. Networking and personal selling require one-on-one attention and that acquires a tremendous amount of time. When you get busy, your ability to do those two tasks drops off. If networking and personal selling stops, you'll find yourself with periods without work. You'll need to find ways to keep your client pipeline full. Balancing your networking and personal selling with an advertising and sales promotion plan will help you avoid the promotional peaks and valleys that create ups and downs in your success.

## The Art of Shameless Self-Promotion

No one tells your story like you can. Most of us are modest about our skills and abilities, and we just stand in a crowd waiting to be discovered through our hard work and expertise. In a world where we deal with tyranny of the urgent, immediate gratification, and a fire hose spewing thousands of marketing and information messages each day, do the undiscovered really stand a chance without a promotional strategy? NO!

If you want to be successful, your promotional strategy has to consist of a blended approach that includes publicity, advertising, sales promotion, and personal selling. However, some of these approaches carry more weight than others. People know that advertising – whether it's in a newspaper, on television, or on Monster.com in the form of a résumé – is initiated and/or paid for by the promoter. If we are selling ourselves or our company, we are telling our own story, and our effort is sometimes considered biased.

However, when an article appears about someone in the newspaper or she is quoted in a magazine, somehow that changes everything – even though the promoter probably received the initial exposure because of a publicity effort that she initiated. One of the things I learned after I wrote my first book, *Networking Zone: The Business Referral Network Construction Guide*, was that I was suddenly elevated to the level of guru the day my book was published even though I had the same knowledge the day before. Perception shouldn't be discounted when developing your own promotional strategy.

That's why I love networking. It uses a combination of promotional tools. You are putting yourself out there so people can get to know you, and you are telling your own story in your own words. If you are likeable and sincere in addition to having the right product available at the right price, you have a great start. Networking allows you to multiply your reach. You have the chance to educate the people you meet about your product or service so they can educate the people they know. Good for you if you have many chances to tell your story to your target buyer but that's generally rare.

If you are telling your story in the right way so those people you meet can educate those in their network, suddenly the magic of word-of-mouth kicks in. When someone else tells your story and recommends or refers you, it establishes the same level of respect as if you were quoted in a magazine. No matter how knowledgeable, ethical, and hard working you are, your perceived level of validity is always elevated when someone else says so.

## Creating a Promotional Strategy Based on Networking

Networking is generally regarded as the art of meeting new businesspeople. It's a great way to meet prospects and can be a great alternative to cold calling. No smart salesperson should operate without a networking strategy. However, networking can benefit literally everyone. We don't realize that when we play softball on the church team that we are part of a network. When we join a professional association, we become part of a network. As the member of a family, you are part of a network. Your networks can create a common foundation upon which to build a relationship. When you engage in a series of meaningful conversations with people in those networks, you build solid business relationships with people who are willing to introduce you to others and refer you to people they know.

To begin the process of creating a promotional strategy, evaluate your goals and build relationships with the network you have. It might not be strong enough to help you accomplish your goals, but someone in your network can probably connect you to a new network.

Networking isn't just for business. A new mom may want to meet other new moms to create a support system as she transitions from working woman to stay-at-home mom. A coordinator of a charity event can use networking to recruit volunteers for his committee. Networking is a fantastic resource for a human resources manager who is looking for talented job applicants. You just need to know who you want to meet.

### Identifying Your Target Market

One of the most important things to consider when you embark on your journey to build a business referral network is who you want to meet – your target market. It's never a bad thing to meet a lot of people because everyone crosses our path for a reason. However, you only have so much discretionary time. Creating a strategy for building your network will move you to success faster.

Connections can create a personal power grid – the more quality connections you have, the more “in demand” you are among your peers. A strong network can create a list of preferred suppliers and offer those you know quick access to a trusted peer network. Anything you need will be just a phone call away. You'll become known as the “go to” person

whenever anyone needs something, and you'll find that people count on you to connect them.

Who you need to meet has a lot to do with your objectives. As a business owner, I want to meet people who could become my customers. However, as a corporate employee, my motivation to network was to facilitate my job duties – knowing people in other departments definitely helped. It also made it easier to job search because I found out about job openings before they were made public. When I started volunteering with charity organizations, meeting people in the community connected me to sponsors, volunteers, and other people necessary to helping my charities.

If you don't know who you need to meet, complete the exercise on page 8.

### **Defining Your Niche: Finding Treasures in Your Current Gold Mine**

Identifying your target market is a powerful exercise in defining a niche. If you are in sales, you wouldn't turn anyone away just because they aren't in your target market. However, networking is a marketing activity and it's impossible to market yourself to everyone. Time and money considered, you only have a limited supply of each. You'll spread them too thin trying to reach too many different markets. It's like spraying a cup of water over a large area. It won't benefit anything because there is too little to go around. However, if you take the same amount of water and use it on just one plant, you can sustain a strong, healthy plant.

Choosing one or two target markets to go after allows you to work smarter instead of harder. The quicker you determine your niche, the faster you'll reach your promotional goals. The nice thing about niching is that you can invest time getting to know one group of people. You'll learn their preferences, needs, and interests. You'll also discover how to find them. As you work with the people in your target market, you'll learn even more about them. They also tend to know people just like themselves. If you do a great job serving them, then you stand a good chance of them referring you to their peers as well.

### **Know Who Your Customer Is**

If you are prospecting to build your business, look at the companies you presently serve, and go after more companies just like them. You most likely already know their needs and desires, where they network, and what motivates them. Over time, you even learn what types of advertising they

respond to and where they get their information. You probably have created success stories among their peers. Focus your promotional efforts on that market segment. It will allow you to increase your visibility in front of your target client with greater success.

That is the hardest advice for me to take. I give it all the time, but I'm like everyone else – always looking for ways to increase my client base. I'm not saying that you shouldn't look for unserved parts of the market. What I'm suggesting is that you take a more focused approach to your business.

Any novice will say, "Everyone is my target customer." Okay, repeat after me, "Everyone is NOT my target customer." While there is some chance

### Who Needs to Be In Your Your Network?

What are three of your goals that could benefit from knowing the right people?

- 1. \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. \_\_\_\_\_

For those goals, write down the types of people you need to meet.

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Where could you go to meet those people? Do a little research on the local professional associations, intercompany organizations, and volunteer opportunities for ideas.

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that anyone could be your customer, you'll get more market awareness and success if you'll focus on particular market segments. Only initiate calls to those types of customers, and customize your marketing approach to their interests and terminology.

Of course, you should follow a lead to another type of company, and consider working with anyone who approaches you. You can always determine if you are the right fit for the potential customer by engaging in some meaningful conversation. Narrowing your marketing focus will allow you to maximize your marketing dollars and exposure to your target client. The added focus will prevent you from spinning your wheels.

### Building a Network That Benefits Your Current Professional Role

Make a list of the information, products, or services you need.

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Write down everyone you know who provides those items.

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If you don't have at least two providers for each link in your network, make a list of those deficiencies. Who do you need to meet?

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Where will you find those people to add to your support network?

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Another expert I recommend is Thomas J. Stanley, PhD and his *Networking with Millionaires* CD box set. He suggests that you target a single type of client. Join affinity organizations where that target client may network, hold membership, and serve in leadership roles. You will benefit by better understanding their needs, interests, and concerns. Do a great job for someone in that affinity group, and they will refer you to their friends within the same group – probably people just like them. When you get to know their area of interest well, they grow to understand that you are sincerely interested in helping them.

Here is an example. Say your target clients are home builders. You would benefit from joining the Home Builder's Association and getting involved in the organization. You should definitely volunteer for a position on the board or as committee leader. You'll get to know people while you serve alongside them. Thomas Stanley suggests becoming an advocate for their industry and writing letters to political leaders who can affect legislation that eases their industry challenges. You'll become their hero.

My database list is loaded with over 2,100 contacts. Those are people I have developed relationships with over the years. I am a customer, friend, family member, peer, or service provider to those contacts. I can open up the local business journal or newspaper to find names of people I need to add to that list. Not all those people are my target customer but a sizeable number of them are. I would venture to guess that a number of people who know me don't know everything they should know about my company.

Decide first who your target customer is – that customer you can help the most, who is most profitable, and who is most likely to want to pay for your services. Then, decide who fits that description in your current list of contacts. Pull those folks aside into a special target customer list. After that, you can add people who fit that list who are not in your database yet. You should always be on the lookout for potential customers. In addition to your local media publications, use chamber of commerce and professional association membership lists to find contact information for other potential clients.

### **Is Any Networking Function a Waste of My Time?**

In networking, you must not focus on selling directly to the people you meet. Your mission is to educate them about your company and your ideal potential customer only *after* you invest the time in getting to know them.