

# Prisma Consulting Limited

## WORKING A ROOM

Working a Room or Breaking a Room is one aspect of the powerful, and closely related, marketing tools of Networking and Referral Marketing. In today's competitive world generating quality leads at minimum cost that result from Networking and Referral Marketing is a compelling formula, certainly when compared to traditional methods such as advertising and exhibitions. It is therefore worth a closer look at some basic concepts associated with Working a Room.

Firstly we should look at why people network – and this article relates to business networking and not social networking. There are however people who network for business/social reasons. These are generally the self-employed or home workers who miss the personal interaction of the staff restaurant lunch or the after work drink on a Friday. Some people network for educational reasons as many events include free presentations as well as the knowledge that can be accumulated from conversations with business peers.

However the vast majority of networkers are looking to grow their business and find new clients. The first rule of networking is that you are not there to SELL to the people in the room! It is amazing how many people attend networking events with the objective of handing out as many business cards as possible and hope, even expect, to generate new business. A 'spray and pray' strategy rarely works. Having said that you are not there to Sell, networking is part of the SALES PROCESS.

A quick extract from Prisma's *Joined Up Business Development* sales and marketing training courses highlights the reasons why you cannot sell to someone you have just met ....

1. People do not buy from people they do not know, do not like or do not trust. **Stage 1 of the Sales Process – Relationship Building**
2. The key to selling is to be a good listener – "Use ears and mouth in the ratio God gave them to you." – **Stage 2 of the Sales Process - Discovery**
3. You cannot sell until you fully understand the reason someone wants to buy – **Stage 3 of the sales process – Matching**

The primary purpose of networking is two-fold.....

1. To build your network – meeting new contacts, listening to their needs, building rapport, building relationships
2. To find people that you can help
  - a. Introduce them to the right people in your network
  - b. Identify people that you could possibly help as supplier, ie potential clients

Business will evolve from these contacts and relationships.

One vital factor to remember at networking is the fact that it is not the people in the room that are the only potential clients; it is the people they know which multiply the potential business from any event x100 at least. From one Prisma source, the Institute of Directors (IOD), I have 4 contacts that I met networking at IOD events, who have introduced me to 16 clients but only 2 of the 4 initial contacts are clients – the rest have come from contacts of contacts of contacts, etc.

This leads in to Referral Marketing but that is a separate topic.

So let us look at the three stages of 'Working a Room':

- Pre-event
- At the event

- Post-event.

### **Pre-Event - Preparation**

There are several things you can do pre-event that will give you a better chance of success on the day:

1. Ensure you are well stocked in business cards well in advance – just in case you need to reorder.
2. Prepare your 'template' post-event follow up email. "Dear -----, It was a pleasure to met you last evening....". The more time you can cut out of the post-event activities the better and more likely you are to complete them.
3. Allocate time in your diary immediately post-event to do the follow up work – I suggest ½ day.
4. It is valuable to get a copy of the list of attendees. A call or email to the event organiser requesting the list gets a positive result 95% of the time. Normally a PDF document containing Delegate Name, Title and Company are provided.
5. From the Delegate List you can research attendees and highlight those individuals you want to meet. LinkedIn (online network) can be useful to profile 'targets' and maybe find common business associates

### **At the Event - Execution**

The following suggestions will help achieve a successful event:

1. Wear name badge on Right lapel as it is easier to read when shaking hands
2. Do not work with a colleague – you end up talking to each other about work between conversations and losing valuable time
3. Many, if not most, people find the task of going up to strangers and starting a conversation difficult. Some ways to overcome those inhibitions include:
  - a. Arrive early – new people are coming in and looking for someone to speak to
  - b. Stay to the end – again more individuals alone and easy to open conversation
  - c. Ask your host to make introductions to the 'target' contacts you have identified pre-event
4. Clearly anyone on their own is wanting to meet someone new and so approach with a positive mindset and start with a confident
  - a. "Good Evening". They will certainly reply with something similar and then you introduce yourself.
  - b. "My name is Mike Preston from Prismaea." They normally also introduce themselves but if not look at their badge and ask
  - c. "Where are you from?" You can then ask what they do if appropriate, or how they have found the event
5. Once you have completed the basic formalities you can ask
  - a. "What is your ideal client?" or
  - b. "How can I help you?"
6. Breaking into a conversation
  - a. Chose small groups – 3 is ideal but 2 is also fine.
  - b. Approach directly, do not hover around the group
  - c. If one person is clearly dominant then approach towards him or her – in their eye-line
  - d. Ask "May I join you?"
  - e. Everyone is there to network and meet others and you will not be refused.
  - f. One you have broken the conversation apologise for the interruption and ask the person speaking to continue.
  - g. You will be asked what you do at the next break in topic.
7. At some point you will be asked "And what do you do?" This you your cue for your **Elevator Speech.**
  - a. There are essentially two occasions to use an Elevator Speech (derivation – the time you have to impress someone in an elevator (US)) and therefore two different kinds of Elevator Speech.

- i. Firstly at formal, structured, networking events, such as BRE or NRG events in the UK, where each person round a table has 1 or 2 minutes to present their business
    - ii. At informal networking events where delegates are 'Working the Room'.
  - b. Here we will focus on the latter at an informal event
  - c. Firstly you have to make it interesting and, vitally, of relevance to the person asking the question
    - i. So an answer "My name is Mike Preston and I am a Partner at solicitors Smith Jones and Preston." Does not stimulate further conversation.
    - ii. Whereas an answer "I help prevent company directors going to jail," demands a second enquiry along the lines of "That's interesting how you do that?" You can then explain your services to an interested and captive audience.
  - d. When they ask "What do you do?" they really mean "What can you do for me or my business?"
  - e. So like any sales situation look at it from the Prospect's viewpoint.
    - i. Do not explain what you do ..... "We provide marketing services."
    - ii. Instead say "We help companies with minimal in-house marketing skills drive up revenue." – again presenting a benefit to the listener that they are more likely to relate to.
    - iii. OR
    - iv. Do not say "We design web sites."
    - v. Instead say "We help companies create leads via their web site by showing them innovative ways that the average company is not aware of."
- 8 It is sometimes difficult to get away from someone who clearly hates circulating and is happy to have a long discussion about anything. Here is a script to politely extract yourself from that scenario....
  - a. "Well John I am sure you are here to network and meet as many people as possible, as I am, and so I will not hold you up any longer. I have your card and will look up your web site to get further background. It was good to meet you [handshake]."
- 9 Use the contact's business card to make relevant notes, eg 'interested in sales training' or event to describe the person as a reminder, eg 'the guy with the orange tie'. However it is polite to ask if you may do so and beware that some cultures do not find this acceptable.

### **Post Event – Follow Up**

The area of networking most commonly overlooked is the critical post-event follow-up. This includes:

- 1 Enter the details from new contacts business cards into your database. Business cards scanners save time here – or alternatively key them in on the train on the way home from the event.
- 2 Look up the web site of the companies you met to expand your understanding of their business.
- 3 Send courtesy emails to new contacts, mention the fact that you have looked at the web site –and add any appropriate comments. The generic pre-set email must be adapted to suit specific discussions eg I will forward the additional data I promised shortly. Add a little summary of what you do as reminded for them.
- 4 Then action all the commitments you made such as introductions promised or information to be provided.
- 5 Another tip from Prisma's ***Joined Up Business Development*** sales and marketing training courses:
  - a. Send out a courtesy email immediately after the event and include a list of any actions you committed to (the same applies to business meetings)
  - b. Then send a second email to complete the action
- 6 This has the benefit of :
  - a. Not delaying the courtesy follow up for a day or so until you have gathered the data you promised (and which may be forgotten)

- b. You are starting the relationship building process and you are gaining TRUST
  - c. You made your first promise and now you have delivered on it
- 7 Look up your new contacts on LinkedIn and send an invitation to connect where appropriate
- 8 Finally the objective of building relationships is to meet 1-2-1 and so you now need to follow up potential clients and intermediaries with a meeting. So call within a week to arrange a meeting.

**Mike Preston**

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Mike Preston is Managing Director of Prisma Consulting Ltd providers of International Business Development and Sales Training / Consultancy services to a wide range of clients both in UK and globally.

Sales training courses include the established ***Joined Up Business Development*** – series of sales principles, ideas and techniques designed for both non-sales professionals such as lawyers, accountants, hoteliers and executives, as well as dedicated sales staff.

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