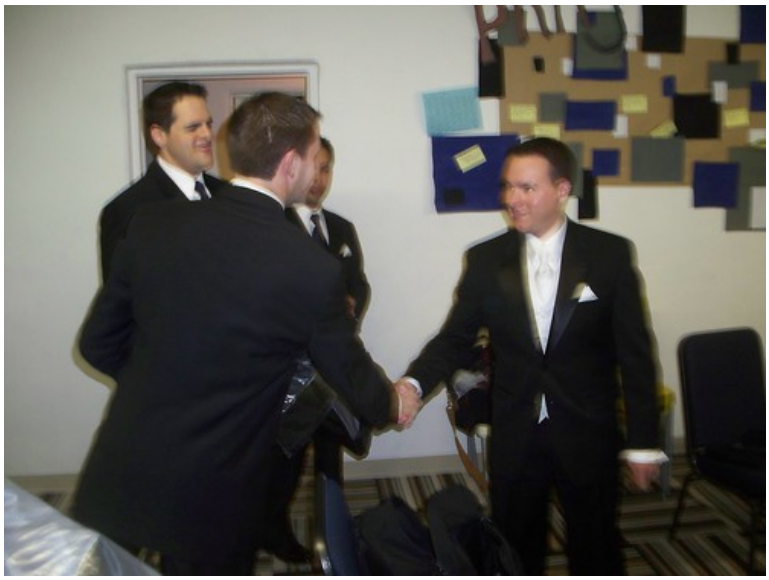
How to make networking events a better marketing opportunity

Everybody goes to networking events at one point or another. Some go because they feel they have to and others go because they love to network. The bottom line is that networking is an integral part of marketing, both personal and business. Opportunities always stem from personal relationships and networking is just the path to extend and strengthen your personal relationships.

December is probably the prime networking month as there are all sorts of holiday parties and end of year ceremonies. But if you don’t think about your networking, all you will end up doing is wasting time (and money).



Handshake by B.T. Indrelunas on Flickr

The inspiration for this post was a woman I “met” at a party last week. I didn’t actually meet her because she was a walking networking don’t. She approached me and a friend, greeted us, but didn’t introduce herself. She babbled about

the holidays (actually told us about her Thanksgiving dinner), and then said she wanted to get food, and turned around and left. Some time later, she sat down next to me and did not even try to make conversation. She wandered around the party aimlessly. Someone told me she was job-hunting. My impression was that she was slightly unhinged, and had no idea of how to connect with people.

Don't be like that woman! You can make networking events a good marketing tool for yourself or your business if you follow some dos and don'ts.

Do this:

Have an objective in mind. You should ask yourself what you would like to get out of this event.

Work on your introduction. Have a short but complete overview of who you are, something like: Hi, my name is Jane Doe, and I am a graphic designer at XZ agency, an Anytown-based advertising agency that specializes in the tech industry.

Perfect your handshake, smile and body language. A strong but not bone crushing grip, a nice smile and an open stance will help make you more likeable.

Think about your appearance. Match your dress to the occasion. If it's a holiday party, be festive. If it is a morning business meeting, then dress in your business best!

Be interested in the other person. Ask questions and be genuinely interested in the answers.

Have business cards at the ready. Yes, I know people can Google you and phone tap you and whatever, but exchanging business cards is a tangible way to initiate contact.

Follow up. Make sure to send an email to people you have met soon after the event to help establish the connection. You may even suggest going to coffee or lunch and use the

opportunity to get to know the person.

But don't do this:

Hand out business cards indiscriminately. Exchange cards with someone only after you have spoken.

Go for quantity. Some people feel they must work the room and meet everyone. I believe that quality is better than quantity, that is, it is better to meet a couple of people who will remember who you are, than a whole bunch of people than can't place you.

Have a bad handshake. This includes the limp handshake, the overly strong handshake, the clammy handshake, and one that I experienced last week, the calloused, rough skin on the hand shake (use moisturizer!!!).

Be overly self-deprecating. Don't diminish your accomplishments by letting your insecurity shine through.

Act weird. Some people take pride in marching to the beat of a different drummer, and that is fine. But. There is personality and then there is weirdness. Some people (like the woman I mentioned above) don't pick up on social cues. Or then there was the guy who went to the holiday party in a kilt. Using a kilt is limited to the following occasions: when you are a schoolgirl in uniform, at your family's Scottish ancestral ceremony or it is Halloween. You don't want to get attention for the wrong reasons.

Happy networking this holiday season. You may just be a party away from meeting your next employer, project or friend!

What are your networking dos and don'ts?