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Are you guilty of committing these networking sins? **Lisa Butler** outlines how to get the most out of social events without looking like a used car salesman.

# The seven deadly sins of networking.

**W**hen you work in marketing you know the value of networking to advance your business. You probably live and breathe it, spend a lot of time convincing clients to do it and helping them to do it well. Networking can, however, mean different things to different people and as a consequence there's a world of difference between those who've got the networking nous and those who don't.

If any of these networking sinners sounds like you, your business card is probably being disposed of along with the cocktail napkins...

**1. The salesperson.** It amazes me how many people believe they should be selling when they are networking. They launch into a well-rehearsed sales pitch about their business, the services they perform and how day after day they transform other people's businesses. If they come up for air, they might ask you about what you do, and then straightaway talk about how their business complements yours.

Fortunately for the rest of us, these people make it easy to be a good networker. No one wants to be pitched to when they are networking, and if you focus on relationship building and finding ways to genuinely help others, you will stand out from the crowd and be remembered. A giveaway of the salesperson is that as they leave you (after you've only said 10 words in the 10 minutes they've been talking to you and are feeling a little ambushed) they have to look at your business card to remember your name. The golden rule: networking is about relationship building, not selling.

**2. The business card spammer.** These guys are nearly as bad as the salesperson (and often the two are interchangeable). How often do you come across the inept networker thrusting their business card at you and

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everyone else within reach, or talking ad nauseam about how fantastic they are and how successful their business is, then moving on to the next group of spamming victims? These people give networking a bad name, and turn people off being involved – their idea of a successful evening is clearing their business card holder.

At a lunch I attended recently, one guest handed out her business cards to everyone at our table then moved on to the next table – she didn't speak to anyone, just squeezed in between guests, did a card drop and moved on. No one at the table knew her name, what she did or why she was even at the lunch – her impact? Nothing more than a waste of money printing the cards she dropped on every table.

**3. The wallflower.** Coming to a networking function, but standing on your own in a room full of people is not networking. It may be disappointing to some, but networking involves introducing yourself to new people – people you haven't met before – and this can be quite difficult for most of us to do. The key here is to be prepared and take your time, choose your group carefully (some groups look open to invasion and others don't), and position yourself to make eye contact with the friendliest looking person in the group. You will be amazed at how the group responds when they

see you want to join in. Be prepared to do a self-introduction and get the conversation going again, perhaps ask a question or make an observation. Be prepared to answer questions about what you do in a way that opens up the conversation, but is not a pitch. Regardless of what you've heard “Do you come here often?” is not a great way to start the conversational ball rolling.

**4. The close talker.** Often the best networkers are those who have more introverted personalities. This is due to their relaxed approach – they focus on individuals, develop one-on-one relationships and are often better at keeping in touch with people. People can, however, be intimidated by two people engaging in conversation and may be hesitant to join. This can limit your networking experience if you want to get out and meet new people. In a social setting, seeing two people engaging in conversation emits an impression of intimacy, so it's difficult to know whether it is appropriate to enter the conversation. Often the way they are standing says a lot about how open they will be to you joining in – although beware, as there are some gender differences here. Interestingly, women tend to stand more square on when conversing, and men prefer to converse standing more side on. Female pairs therefore are harder to ‘break into’ than male pairs.

**5. The short-term gain seeker.** It's in our nature to be inherently impatient and want immediate results. Some people go to a function and assume they will charm everyone with their good looks and wit and walk away with a massive contract, but it seldom happens that way. The key is to be patient and persistent. Networking is a long-term game, and you need to treat it with respect. Many people hear the word ‘networking’ and assume that it is all about going to functions or events. This is only a small part of the bigger picture of being



an effective networker. The skilled networkers know that networking is really about how you keep in touch with people, and focus on helping them. It can be fun maintaining contact with people and typically the pay-offs are far more valuable than if you take a shorter-term approach. Never underestimate the networking value of people you meet, you will be amazed by who they know and how they could potentially help you. Impatient networking

types are quickly identified by the interrogation-style approach to meeting new people with a succession of quick-fire questions: Who are you? Who do you work for? What do you do? As soon as you respond with answers that don't interest them, they either appear to lose interest (the darting eyes tell all) or they move on to the next victim.

**6. The comfort zoner.** Too many of us are guilty of attending networking events with

work colleagues and standing in a close-knit circle talking to the same group of people that we see every single working day. Naturally, we all feel more comfortable walking into events and chatting to people we know. It can often be a better idea to go with one or two people from work, however, and branch out to make new contacts – divide and conquer. If you are hesitant to attend an event alone, take a wingman (or woman) for support. It can be much easier to approach other small groups together and then branch out into your own conversations within that group.

**7. The fluffer.** We have all met these people and may even be guilty of being one of them from time to time. Fluffers can be heard when you walk into a room; they dominate conversation and can be accused of being fake. They will normally engage in conversation, but will not really be listening to what you have to say and are thinking of what they are going to say next. Fluffers are friendly in nature, but commit a very important networking sin – not being committed to establishing genuine relationships and not really being interested in helping others.

We individually need to deal with our own personal networking demons in order to experience greater comfort and success when networking. Many people say they find networking uncomfortable, fake and lacking in any real tangible benefits. Typically, we have these thoughts about networking because we aren't giving ourselves the best chance to make it successful. Networking is about helping others, regardless of the situation. Avoid these networking sins and wait for the magic to happen. **M**