

Specialistfeature

How to net a contact with a good line in small talk...



For some it's their idea of hell, and for others it's the perfect way to find new business. **David Barnes**, managing director of DB Public Relations, gives a few hints on how to be a success at networking

Networking. To some the very word sends a shiver down their spine. To others the idea of being able to meet the person who signs the next business deal, while enjoying convivial company in relaxed surroundings, is a red letter day in the business week.

Despite the plethora of imaginative and ingenious ways which exist these days to promote yourself and your business on the internet, social networking sites, mobile phones, email blasts and the rest, the personal touch remains the best and most effective. And let's face it, if we're honest, offers the most fun.

Now I know what you're thinking. You have this stereotypical image conjured up in your mind. The picture is probably of a dimly lit, unfamiliar room filled with a gaggle of people, mainly (sad to say, but changing slowly) men in suits, standing around at some unearthly hour in the morning holding cups of coffee close to their chests. The groups of three or four all seem to know each other extremely well and to be getting on like the proverbial house on fire.

The chances are these knots of animated networkers are in fact all the from the same office or are business colleagues who make a point of meeting up at these functions to chew the fat.

How on earth do you get started, especially as they don't seem as though they are looking for anyone else to join their group?

Well, have another look. Outside the closed units there will be others, perhaps on their own or in loose open groups of

two or three, asking each other questions and chatting. They'll welcome another networker and will be as keen for you to join as you are to get started.

But how do you get started and what do you say?

Well, here a bit of preparation is worthwhile. In the case of a formal networking event, which you will have had in your diary for a while, it's always best to have done a bit of preparation.

I'm not suggesting a full bells and whistles PowerPoint presentation here, but what is known in these circles as the elevator pitch. The what?

The simple premise of this is that you're in a lift when you find that also in there with you is the MD of the firm you have been trying to contact for ages. Now's your chance. In the time the doors close and the lift travels from top to bottom you have your prospect of selling yourself and your business.

But what do you say? Based on the idea that you already know who the person is and what they do, you don't have to ask any questions – you say who you are, what you do, how you do it, why you're the best, perhaps mention a well-known business with which you have had recent dealings and how the MD needs you and how you can do business together. As the lift glides to a halt (if it gets stuck you have a even better chance to sell), you flourish your business card while accepting his and promise to get in touch to set up a meeting

Practise this technique before attending any networking gathering and the second

hurdle will be a doddle.

Second. What about just talking to someone at a breakfast say that you've never met before and have no idea about what they do and who they are?

This is where the ice breaker comes in handy.

An ice breaker can be something as simple as a comment on the weather, a recent sporting event or the quality of the surroundings. Or, if you have been directed to the person by a facilitator at the event and know what it is that they do, you could be as bold as to say something like: "Hi, I think I've got what you need..."



Let your words give your business a lift