

The Effectiveness of Networking

It is not what you know, but who you know that makes the difference – and this is especially true in the world of networking.

Everyone claims to know that networking is beneficial – why do so few people do it? They find no instant gratification? No immediate increase in sales? They don't have the time or money? Networking is one of the most inexpensive and effective ways to grow a business. It is ultimately based on building two-way relationships of not only what others can do for you, but what you can do for them. Building relationships, receiving and suggesting referrals, and being genuine are all key in growing your business.

Being confident enough to be able to talk about your business anywhere and everywhere is the key to networking. This means being able to speak about your business on the spot anywhere - the elevator, the grocery store, in any situation where someone is interested in what you have to say. The best way to build the skill is by using it, and there are many different places to network within the Kitchener Waterloo area, and a lot of networking opportunities online.

Greater Kitchener-Waterloo Chamber of Commerce

The Chamber offers more than simply *Bright Ideas* about networking. The Chamber hosts events throughout the region that offer wonderful opportunities for networking.

- Rogers Business After Five is one of the many programs offered to help business be successful. You can enjoy complimentary hors d'oeuvres and refreshments, win one of the many door prizes, and meet old friends and new.
- TD Canada Trust - Chamber Young Professionals offers an opportunity to meet with like-minded business people at fun and exciting events: an evening of helicopters, planes, and networking games hosted at the Region of Waterloo International Airport; a casual 9-hole round of golf and networking, a light BBQ and cocktail reception held at the River Edge Golf Club. You get the idea.
- Waterloo Region Immigrant Employment Network (WRIEN) is an initiative hosted by the Chamber to “support regional employers in their efforts to attract, hire, engage and retain foreign trained professionals as strategic members of their workplace.” A schedule of networking breakfasts and other events is available on the WRIEN website: www.wrien.com

For more information about the exciting Chamber networking opportunities, check out the events calendar at www.greaterkwchamber.com.

Communitech

Communitech: Waterloo Region Technology Association is an industry led organization that supports Waterloo Region technology companies. According to its members, networking is the #1 benefit of membership. Visit the Communitech website at www.communitech.ca/en to view their events calendar and learn more about membership.

Small Business Community Network

The Small Business Community Network is a great example. The SBCN is a networking group for small business owners and professionals in Kitchener, Waterloo, Guelph, and Cambridge. The SCBN holds regular meetings that provide great networking opportunities for area

businesses. Once a month, guest speakers are invited to speak on topics that are crucial to the business owner. There is plenty of time for networking with everyone there, whether they are members or guests. Attendees of the SBCN are encouraged to bring along marketing information to display at the meetings. The monthly meetings cost \$5 for members and \$10 for guests. The SBCN meetings take place in a friendly atmosphere that “fosters conversations that lead to discovering what your fellow business owners are looking for and ways that you can work with them or for them,” as stated by Linda Ockwell-Jenner, the founder of the SBCN. For more information about the Small Business Community Network, visit their website at www.sbcncanada.org.

LinkedIn & Plaxo

Another option for business professionals are national and global websites that offer networking opportunities. LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com) has become a big hit locally. Once you become a member, (which is completely free), you are instantly connected with over 20 million experienced professionals from around the world. LinkedIn’s philosophy states “your professional relationships are key to your professional success.” Another great networking website, similar to LinkedIn is Plaxo at www.plaxo.com.

Now that you have read how networking can be effective in growing your business and a few cost efficient ways to network, keep in mind some key facts about networking:

- It is built on the relationships you build and maintain
- It is a great way to meet new contacts and be known within your industry or community
- Be confident enough to talk about your business anywhere and everywhere
- Networking isn’t scary and it can be a lot of fun!

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