

Networking Tips That Work ... Even If You Think You Hate Networking

By Hayley Michaels



You're a writer, and you like to, well ... write. For you, the idea of networking might have about as much appeal as standing on burning coals.

You're busy. You really don't need one more task to do, especially one you don't like.

The thought of a roomful of people where the loudest and most confident are spouting their sales pitches, commanding attention, and thrusting business cards into everyone's hands can send you running for the hills.

But this isn't the only way, or even the most successful way, to network.

The truth is networking doesn't have to be a painful experience. It's something every writer not only needs to do but can do successfully. Introvert or extrovert. New or experienced.

The networking playground doesn't only belong to the most confident and outgoing. Everyone, including you, can play on it and build a strong network for a successful freelance writing business.

There are three essential elements to building a successful network that will allow your web-writing business to thrive so you can live the writer's life.

When you understand each of these elements and how they help you, you'll be able to build a networking strategy that fits easily into your life.

These three elements are:

- Understanding the benefits of a well-constructed network. This is the source of your motivation.
- Knowing who should be in your network. Making the right connections will make all the difference.
- Learning how to build a quality network. This is what brings it all together.

A strong network offers you three main benefits:

1.

Referrals, clients, and stability

- Networking lets you meet prospects, turn them into clients, and improve and stabilize your income. [Your network can open doors to new opportunities.](#)

2.

Information and advice

- As a writer, information is essential to your business. Although the internet is an infinite source of information, sometimes you need an expert to point you in the right direction, offer a different viewpoint or provide expert answers.
- While your skill and talent is in writing, you have many other roles and responsibilities to fulfill so your business can run smoothly. Having the right people in your network when you need advice or help with anything from tax preparation, computer problems, or a burst water pipe will save you a lot of time, trouble and expense.

3. Support

- Writing, along with being a business owner, can be lonely. It's easy to find yourself feeling isolated as you try to solve problems on your own.

You need people who can offer mental, emotional, and professional support.

During your writing career, you're going to need trusted people to bounce ideas off of and to offer advice regarding problems with your work or a client. You also need someone who can share a different perspective, give you feedback on a project, or be a shoulder to cry on.

Your [support network](#) helps you ride out the storms and challenges you'll face.

Understanding the benefits of a well-constructed network gives you insight into who should be in your network.

Connecting with the right people

You need people in your network who will fill the three categories mentioned above, such as:

- Fellow writers with a variety of skills and niches
- Colleagues from previous professions
- Other business owners
- People from different professions
- Writing and business coaches and mentors
- Suppliers
- Friends
- Family
- People who you meet at church, hobby groups, and sporting and community events
- Mastermind and accountability groups

So, now you know why you need a network and who you need in it. The next step is to put in place plans and strategies to build it.

Building a strong network of web-writing allies

Despite how busy you may be or how much you may not like networking, remember the following:

- Networking is a skill you can learn, no matter who you are.
- The best way to succeed with networking is to have a plan and purpose.

With this in mind, here's how you can win at networking:

1.

Network outside the box.

Networking doesn't have to take place only at networking and business events. While it's a good idea to include some networking events in your work calendar, plan to network anywhere and everywhere.

You can network while standing in a store checkout line, at your child's school events, church, sports clubs, hobby groups or anywhere you can strike up a conversation with another person. You never know where you might meet a potential client.

The beauty of this approach is your prospect is already warm, because you've started to build a relationship. It's less intimidating and easier than talking to someone you don't know at a formal event.

I have met people at pilates class, my son's school and my husband's work functions who have turned into loyal, repeat clients or formed part of my support network.

By keeping yourself open to networking opportunities anywhere and everywhere, you may also meet people who have answers to questions or insights to help your business.

2.

Focus on quality not quantity.

Good networking isn't about speaking to as many people as you can. It's about making quality contacts whom you can build into a strong and reliable network.

You want to gain good clients who value what you do, pay what you're worth, do business with you repeatedly, and refer more valuable clients to you.

A strong network is also about having good support contacts. You want people who will give you the best advice, refer the best suppliers, and share the best information to you.

3.

Have a plan and purpose for your networking.

To build a successful network, have a plan and a purpose. This applies whether you're attending a networking event or chatting to the person next to you in the checkout line.

Here's what you need to consider:

- If you're attending a networking or business event, decide who you need to meet. From there, you'll be able to evaluate if the event will give you access to these people, so you can determine if it's worthwhile to attend.
- If these events make you uncomfortable, rehearse what you need to say. This includes introducing yourself, speaking about your business, and asking pertinent questions.
- Set goals such as: "I will talk to three new people," or "I'll find two potential prospects."

You don't have to talk to every person in the room. Quality trumps quantity. It's better to come away with two good prospects rather than a pocketful of business cards that mean nothing once you leave the building. One good contact can give you repeat business, refer clients to you, or offer great advice.

4.

Ask quality questions.

Asking quality questions is vital for every writer and networker.

Knowing how to ask quality questions and listen for the answers gives you a treasure chest of information. It helps you draw out useful information so you can direct the conversation to your area of expertise.

If you get nervous when networking and talking about your business, have some "go to" questions to help you get the ball rolling until you master the art of asking effective questions. These can be questions such as:

- What challenges are you facing in your business?

- How do you deal with ____?

The following tips will help you ask quality questions that lead to thoughtful answers and more information:

- Start by knowing what information you're looking for.
- Open-ended questions lead to further conversation. These are "Who, What, Where, When and How" questions.
- Dig deeper with specific questions that give you insight and help you to identify particular issues. These are questions such as: "What do you mean by that? Tell me more about ____? What makes you say that?"
- Ask what outcomes the person would like to achieve: "What benefits do you need to achieve? How do you want it to turn out?"

Good questions make you a good conversationalist, and give you answers that can help you address your most pressing needs. From there, you can identify if and how that person will fit into your network.

They also help give you insight into the needs of the person you're talking to, which can help you decide if your services can help and how best to offer them.

5.

Networking is about give and take.

If you need support, make sure you give support. If you need information, give information when it's needed. If you need clients and referrals, make sure you give referrals, too. To build an effective network, reciprocate with the people in it.

6.

Networking is about listening and speaking.

Listen more than you speak. This way you'll get all the information you need to provide a well-thought-out response.

People feel more valued when they feel heard, and this is the first step to building a good relationship with your potential clients.

If you're more introverted, listening is one of your networking superpowers. You have the ability to hear what potential clients' problems are, apply your knowledge and experience to them, and make connections.

Your downfall may be you don't speak up and offer solutions. Or, you struggle to talk about your business and the services you offer in a way that addresses and informs your prospect's problem.

If you're more extroverted, your superpower is being able to talk and engage people with ease and present your business with confidence.

Be careful not to let your thoughts or what you want to say gallop ahead. Really hearing what the person is saying or asking is important. If you don't, you'll miss the opportunity to respond to them in a way that truly addresses their questions and concerns or builds a relationship.

7.

Master the art of relationship marketing.

The best networking is really relationship marketing.

When you do treat it as such, your network will start to work for you. Because the people in it will care about you.

Here are a few final tips to help you build quality relationships quicker and to ensure your networking efforts pay off:

- *Let your business card work for you.*

Your business card may look nice, but is it effective? It's a good idea to have your professional headshot on your card. It helps jog the person's memory when they look at it later.

A powerful tagline reminds them what you do.

Besides essential contact information, make sure it directs them online to connect with you on your website or through social media.

- *Follow up quickly.*

If you have connected well with a potential client, ask how they like to make contact. Is it by phone, email, coffee shop meeting, or social media? Then follow up and start building a relationship. Remind them who you are, what you do, and the connection you've made.

If you have free material such as a course, e-book or article that will help them with a problem you've spoken about, offer to send it to them, and do so as soon as possible.

- *Harness the power of online marketing.*

Direct your contact to your online profile or website. Your writer's website is a powerful networking tool. Today, it's natural for people to check out others on the web.

Having a professional website establishes your credibility. You can build relationships by having them sign up for newsletters, to receive social media updates, to download free courses or e-books, or read testimonials from your satisfied clients.

These are all ways you reinforce your professional expertise, establish credibility, remind your prospect who you are and how you can help them.

Potential clients don't always need your service immediately. Online networking is a great way to maintain contact and build relationships with good prospects. This way, when they're in need, you're the first person who comes to mind.

- *Nurture and reward loyal clients.*

Encourage good clients to work with you again. Keep in touch with them and give them value in exchange for their time and business.

Repeat clients spend more than new clients. This is because they have a relationship with you and know the value they'll be getting.

Loyal customers are your best networkers and salespeople. They'll refer clients and opportunities to you that you may never have heard about otherwise. So, keep them close and reward them for their loyalty and referrals.

If you want your writing business to thrive, there are certain roles you have to take on as a business owner. Networking is a necessary one. With the right strategies, it can be fun and easier than you think.

What are your networking challenges and what strategies do you use to overcome them? Please share your thoughts in the comments section below.

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