

Toss the Technology Relationships Still Rule



Joanne S. Black

The Internet and other breakthroughs in communications technology have fundamentally changed the way we do business. We see this technology everywhere—people on laptops, PDAs,

Blackberrys, and cell phones—often to the exclusion of the people right next to them. New technology keeps making communication faster, but not necessarily better.

Ironically, the most important business decisions a customer makes are still based on personal relationships. When I worked for a global consulting and training firm, we had an excellent system for debriefing sales situations and learning why the client made the decision to work with us. Assuming that we had a solution that made us a contender, the number one reason our customers chose us was because they liked us. Multimillion dollar decisions were made because we were able to develop a positive relationship with the customer.

There's a saying among salespeople that customers buy with emotion and justify with fact. If our customers don't like us or feel comfortable with us, they won't buy from us. Research shows that you must get people to start liking you within the first few seconds of your relationship. An email from a fancy gizmo won't make that happen, but a trusted referral and a personal connection will.

Women have a remarkable advantage in building relationships. We are great at making connections, asking insightful questions, and finding creative solutions to problems. We do this every day in our personal lives, and we transfer this skill to our business lives. We often get instant feelings about people upon meeting them. Yes, it's intuition. When we trust it, we soar.

Several years ago, Southwest Airlines aired a commercial that was a powerful reflection on the importance of personal connections in our technology-driven world. Its message:

- You can't fax a handshake.
- You can't pat a voicemail on the back.
- You can't have lunch with an e-mail.
- You can't have coffee with a website.
- You can't slow dance online.
- You can't e-mail a kiss.

That says it all. Fancy technology is alluring, but too many people think that if it's newer and faster it must be a better way. But you need to connect person-to-person first, if you intend to build your business. The power of personal connections is infinite. Think about it—with whom would you prefer to do business: someone you've met only via a cold call or email, or a colleague with whom you have an established and respectful relationship?

Building your business is about relationships and leveraging those relationships to create new ones. I call it referral selling and I know it works. There is an implied trust and an interest and curiosity in meeting with us. The business decision-making time is dramatically shortened,

your competition fades into the background, you establish immediate credibility, and you get a new client more than 50 percent of the time. The relationship is what closes the deal.

When we are referred, we have an immediate connection. We talk about the person who referred us, thereby eliminating those first uncomfortable and awkward steps of the business meeting—explaining who we are and what we do. We also eliminate the question we always wrestle with: "How am I going to begin the conversation?" It's almost like that dreaded first date. What will the guy look like? Will I be too tall or too short? What will I talk to him about?

Women are terrific at getting a complete picture of someone. We are just as interested—if not more so—in an individual's personal story as in her business story. How did she get to where she is? Where does she live? Does she have a family? Where do they like to vacation? Put a woman and a man in the same conversation, and they will come up with an entirely different set of facts.

We network all the time—whether we're in a formal business setting or at a wedding, a dinner party, or a backyard barbecue. Because we are so good at building personal as well as

business relationships, we develop friendships and trust in a heartbeat. This, in turn, leads to more referrals and more sustainable business because people will refer us when they know, like, and trust us.

In an era seemingly dominated by ever-expanding technology, the creative and strategic elements of our business are still crucial. Yes, it requires brainpower. Yes, it requires time. It also requires making a concentrated effort to expand your network and foster new connections. We, as women, are great at this. We network. We connect. We listen. We are not afraid to ask for help when we need it. And when we ask, the most amazing help and support is forthcoming. Women want to help other women succeed.

Remember to connect with people, and you will see your business grow. If you connect only with machines and don't take the time to relate one-on-one with your client ... you won't win over the client and you won't get the sale. Business data may run better on silicon chips but business relationships don't, so leave the technology behind and make the person-to-person connection. ●

Sales strategist Joanne Black is America's leading authority on Referral-Selling and the author of "No More Cold Calling™ The Breakthrough System That Will Leave Your Competition in the Dust" from Warner Business Books. For more information visit www.NoMoreColdCalling.com

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Marketing

Top 10 Tips for Building the Perfect Business Card

Continued from 9

so why not have multiple card designs when you have to influence very different audiences with very different needs? The small amount of money spent developing the additional cards will pay for itself in the form of the extra business gained.

8 Font Size Matters Never use font smaller than 8-10 point on your business card. Cards that have its readers reaching for eyeglasses will only cause frustration. While it's great to be stylish, avoid using an ultra fancy font that's on the verge of being illegible. Make sure the print on your card blends properly with its background color and design.

9 Brag About Yourself Tell the world if you or your organization has won awards. Proudly list any awards on the front or back of your card, as it can only enhance your contact's interest in doing business with you. Whether you are a M.D., L.M.H.C., or Ph.D, list your qualifications and educational status. It won't take up much space and it

will signal that you are knowledgeable and experienced.

10 Don't Break the Bank Business cards are worth every penny, but you don't have to spend a chunk of your marketing budget on them. Search for free business card offers and enlist the services of a company that can produce high-quality yet affordable cards. If you're a small or home business owner, work with a company that allows card orders in small business-friendly quantities.

No matter your budget, these simple tips will enable you to create business cards that put yourself and your organization on the profitable road to customer retention and acquisition. ●

Melissa Crowe is the vice president of marketing services at VistaPrint, an online supplier of graphic design and printed products to small businesses and consumers. Please visit www.vistaprint.com for more business card ideas.

Statistics

Technology

Women owners of firms with \$1 million or more in revenues are more likely than their men counterparts to embrace technology as integral to their business strategy (58% vs. 35%) and more likely to have a web site with transaction capability (56% vs. 38%).

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