



Refine Your Networking Tools to Get Ahead

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Want to make the most of your networking efforts this year?



Before you hit that next breakfast or business luncheon, you may want to re-evaluate your overall networking objectives and strategies.

Just like you'd set personal goals and resolutions, the new year provides a perfect opportunity to clean the slate and start fresh, say experts.

"The beginning of the New Year is the beginning of new opportunities,"

says Susan RoAne, author of "The Secrets of Savvy Networking" (Macmillan Audio; \$14.95) and principal of The RoAne Group, a business networking, communications and book development/promotion firm in Greenbrae, Calif. "It's a chance for a do-over."

So make the most of it and consider these top networking resolutions for 2011.

1. Set goals: Identify clear business goals you'd like to accomplish when participating in events and meetings or joining groups/committees, advises Terri Alessi-Miceli, president of HIA-LI in Hauppauge, one of the region's largest business groups. This will help you achieve measurable business objectives, she notes.

2. Reassess networking strategies: "Time is money," notes Ron Gold, president of The Marketing Group, a professional networking and business association and president of Marketing Works, a public relations, networking and public speaking advisory in East Setauket. Assess whether the groups you're in are creating the right relationships or "be ready to cut the cord," says Gold.

3. Commit to networking: You must be consistent about networking, says Ivan Misner, author of "Networking Like a Pro" (Entrepreneur Press; \$21.95) and founder of BNI, an Upland, Calif.-based business networking organization. "Networking isn't about instant gratification," says Misner, noting it takes time to build relationships.

4. Give a referral before asking for one: Givers gain, notes Misner. If you're actively giving referrals before you expect to get them, people will reciprocate, he notes.

5. Prepare before going to an event: Be relevant and informed. Research the event, as well as industry news and current events, says RoAne. Have three to five items you can work into a conversation if there's a lull, she recommends.

6. Join a committee: It's great for targeted networking, says Alessi-Miceli. Look for committees aligned with your business and interests, she suggests, noting that within HIA-LI "we encourage members to attend at least one committee meeting to see if it is the right fit." The group, which offers more networking tips at bit.ly/hia-li-networking-tips, has more than 19 committees.

7. Follow through on referrals: When people give you referrals, your actions are a reflection on them, says Alessi-Miceli. Follow through quickly, she says, adding, "You want to respect and honor people."

8. Take advantage of speaking opportunities: Most networking groups afford opportunities for members to speak about their business, says Gold. "Every group has spotlights on different businesses, and people don't take advantage of it," he adds.

9. Do more one-on-one networking: If you make a good connection at an event, look for opportunities to follow up with a one-on-one, suggests Gold. It helps build upon the relationship, he notes.

10. Track your networking efforts: Most people wing it when it comes to networking. You won't truly reach your goals unless you track your efforts, says Misner, who includes a networking scorecard in "Networking Like a Pro." It measures whether you've arranged a one-on-one, given a referral, etc., he notes.

11. Combine social media with face-to-face networking: You can't ignore the digital side of networking, says RoAne, who blogs and is active on social networks. Combine offline efforts with your online efforts, she suggests.