

Introduction



When my mother was a child, growing up in Alameda, California, the Botterini's owned the local grocery store. Alameda was a very small community, actually an island, strategically placed in the center of the Bay Area. In the early 20's and 30's, the residents rarely left the island for shopping or entertainment, unless it was to make a "day-trip" to San Francisco or Niles Canyon for a picnic.

One of the benefits in being raised in such a place is that you know everyone and everyone certainly knows who you are! That might not always be good, but if you're in business, and you're fairly good at what you do, it can't hurt!

While shopping for the evening meal, my grandmother asked the youngest of Mr. Botterini's sons, "Reno, who do you know that can repair my fence?" Grandpa had come home a little late, after a few drinks and eliminated about ten feet of the fence!

"Easy Mrs. 'A', Joey and his boys, I'll tell 'em to come by!" Reno gave a understanding nod.

No matter what the need, someone knew someone who could take care of it! They would show up, negotiate a fair rate, most often, they would barter for the service, and everyone was happy!

"Mrs. 'A', my nephew Nicky just started a business repairing cars! Tell your husband, he'll pick up his truck at work, change the oil and have it back to him in time to come home. You tell 'em for me."

It worked too, not only Nicky's aunt, but his mother, father, sisters, three brothers, two other uncles, and so on, became his unofficial sales staff! They touted the extraordinary service and reliability of Nicky's trade. Nicky was sure to be successful, and it didn't hurt that he was the only car repair service on the island for over ten years!

In the 70's and 80's, most businesses found that all they needed to do, was to have a sign painted on the storefront, put an ad in the yellow pages and an occasional ad in the local newspaper to publicize a sale, and they were in business. People would flock to spend their money and support the local shopkeeper!

We're enhancing the 21st century, the times have never been so unpredictable for the small business owner.

Networking (-in) n.

The developing of contacts or exchanges of information with an information network, as to further a career.

We're fortunate if we know our next door neighbors! Even though we are aware that if we get to know them, it provides an extra sense of security while we're away. Neighborhood watches have proven to be a great deterrent of crime. Yet, we've had four different couples on our right and two on our left in only five years time!

Unlike the neighborhood my mother grew up in, she and her father were born in the same house on Second Street, and it was an event if anyone moved into or left the neighborhood!

So, if it's hard to keep up with the coming and going of our neighbors, how can we get to know who repairs computers, has the best long distance service, is a reliable mover and so on?

Easy, through the referrals of other professionals in a business networking environment!

Not everyone is comfortable with networking. It requires an open mind, an attitude of "What do I have to offer?" not "What can I get out of this?" Those who are extremely successful often question members of the networking organization "Who do you want to meet? Accountants, Start-up businesses, do you niche market?"

Justifiably, they are the ones who receive the most as well as the most valuable introductions (leads) from the others! Everyone wants them to succeed, because of their generous attitude!

If you can take this one step further and adapt an awareness of "Who do I know that would be helpful to their business development?" then a business in networking is perfect for you!

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I had never heard of networking until I purchased a travel agency in 1990. I joined the local Chamber of Commerce, assuming everyone who was in business was active in the Chamber. It was a friendly professional environment where I got to know various kinds of business owners.

One of the members invited me to attend a 7:30 breakfast meeting where everyone exchanged business contacts, knowledge of what companies were moving, expanding, and at that time, the beginning stages of the downsizing that is so prevalent today!

"Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the ones you did do."

- Mark Twain

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I couldn't seem to make the time to get there, 7:30 seemed terribly early to start thinking about doing business, and act coherent!

Six months after I had taken over the agency, the US Navy was hanging out in the Gulf of Saudi.

My sales fell from \$90,000 to \$45,000 a month overnight!

I found my way to the 7:30 breakfast meeting. I was pleasantly surprised at how supportive everyone was!

"Did I know that Enco Environmental has field service people traveling all over the country? Jim Roberts is the supervisor!"

I was overwhelmed! I could cold call for a month and not achieve the level of awareness of the many potential travel clients as I was given in that first meeting!

I joined, and I never missed a meeting!

Five months later, the war in Saudi Arabia started, and once again my sales plummeted! This time nearly to the brink of disaster!

The chamber had a networking group, so I joined! There was a women's group that met in the evenings, so I joined! There was a new group starting on Monday mornings at 7 am, I joined!

Within four months, I was actively participating in 15 networking leads groups! The more groups I joined, the more people I got to know! They were all out there, just like I was, trying to survive a difficult time for small business owners and sales professionals!

Newspaper ads are expensive, yellow page ads are nearly cost prohibitive (starting at \$150/month), for a small business owner, especially a brand new business! To reach a wide variety of potential clients, business owners have had to investigate innovative methods of venturing out into the populous. Especially if they're trying to make a statement about their services and products that make them stand out above their competition.

We see three new businesses move in, and three old ones move out. Usually the ones having to close their doors were under capitalized and/or were not open to exploring the options for marketing their business!

"A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step."

- Chinese Proverb

“What I've done has always worked, and I'm convinced that I will make it work!”

Six months, a year or in some cases two to three years later, after all of their retirement money has been spent, they are left with nothing but the memory!

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Early in 1991, I introduced an art supply representative to a chamber director. Within five minutes, they agreed to discuss the possibility of cosponsoring an Art Fair for the chamber as a fund-raiser! It was a “win-win-win” situation. Money would be raised for the chamber, the representative would gain local visibility for her products and the artists that used her products had a wonderful opportunity to display their artwork!

Towards the end of the evening she turned to me and said, “You know, you should figure out how to make a living out of the introductions you are always making!”

“Would you pay me for introducing you to the chamber director?” I asked to prove a point.

“I'm your friend!” She resisted.

“Sure, and everyone else feels as though they're my friend!”

Yet, later that year I began my first official leads group! We met at an insurance office, sixteen of us crowded around the conference table. It wasn't a new idea, but the new twist on the concept, was that you had to know someone to be invited!

That might not always be appropriate, but what happened was that everyone felt comfortable with each other from the beginning! There wasn't a three to six month “getting to know if you're okay” period. We exchanged 18 leads at our very first meeting!

Six months later, after having 35 people on a waiting list, I began the second group! We now met at a bank conference room. Within six more months, I had six groups altogether, with more than 100 business people involved! There was obviously a need and it was working for them!

“People of mediocre ability sometimes achieve outstanding success because they don't know when to quit. Most men succeed because they are determined to.”

- George Allen

Within two years, I started my first specialty group with "Health Practitioners." They usually are not comfortable marketing and don't get out into the business environment very often, because they are bound to their offices. The group produced many profitable relationships.



A sales manager for a local hotel, offered the use of their meeting rooms for Elite Leads to have a Business Trade Fair. Usually when the local chambers have one they charge \$180-\$280 per booth! I was able to offer participation for \$25, have flyers for the fair, circulated by members, and list it in the local business activities of the newspaper. It was a great success! Nearly a hundred people showed up, and there were a few who were not members!

The Tom Hopkins Sales Motivation group heard about Elite Leads and offered to do a "no fee workshop" for my members! Tim Knight at one of the local hotels knew what I had been up to, and offered to host the meeting (usually \$170 for a meeting room), in exchange for two of his sales people attending! Nearly 45 signed up for the presentation, and I began to see a new way of offering more value than the typical networking groups!

Within a month I had six workshops scheduled! The sign-ups were tentative at first, but the titles were "Getting the Most Out of Your Presentation," "Marketing Yourself!" and "Networking Your Way to Success!" Each one was offered by a member of Elite Leads.

The results were multidimensional: the members giving the workshops became more visible within Elite Leads, members received the benefits of the information offered, members met members from other groups as well as increasing their contact base, and Elite Leads was offering "skills improvement" workshops for members, when no one else had thought of it!

By March 1995, I had 12 leads groups, 270 members, and was offering two workshops each month. There are 20 groups throughout the Bay Area, and more than 450 members.

And there you have it . . . the past years have been the most rewarding of all my 30 years of my professional life! Often when people ask what business I'm in, I smile and say, "It's my job to have coffee with some of the greatest business people!"

"There are no guarantees. From the viewpoint of fear, none are strong enough. From the viewpoint of love, none are necessary."

- Emmanuel
