

10 Steps to High Impact Networking

By Kimberly Alford Rice

Kimberly Alford Rice is Principal of KLA Marketing Associates (www.klamarketing.net), a business development advisory firm focusing on legal services. As a law marketing authority, Kimberly helps law firms and lawyers develop practical business development and marketing strategies which lead directly to new clients and increased revenues. Additionally, Kimberly provides career management services to lawyers in transition. She may be reached at 609.458.0415 or via email at kimberly@klamarketing.net.



(Part 1 of 2)

Networking is one of the foundations of client development (no network = no clients). You can't get business if the *right* people don't know, trust, and like you. Commit yourself to gradually building a network of the *right* contacts. Begin by identifying the most likely sources of new business you are trying to develop — your "target audience."

As much as networking is used as a business development tool, few professionals treat it with the attention and follow up it requires to be worthwhile and successful in developing new clients.

To maximize networking events, below are a few tips:

1. **Know Who Will Be There.** Whenever possible, call the event sponsor a day ahead to request a copy of the registration list to gather a sense of who will attend the function. Identify 3-5 prospects you would like to meet during the event and seek them out. Even better is if you can identify someone you know who will attend the event who already knows the prospect you will seek out. Gaining an introduction is a powerful way to make a connection. Consider posting a LinkedIn search.
2. **Prepare for an Event** by doing some online research on prospects' companies and position affiliation to gain a sense of their business/place in organization, etc. The more you know, the better.

Find out as much as possible about the companies' clients, the scope of its business, whether or not the prospect serves in any official roles such as management committee, department chair, etc. This information will also come in handy for introductory conversations. Access LinkedIn, Facebook, Martindale, Law.com, Lexis, etc. for useful information.

3. **Never Arrive Late.** Vince Lombardi said, "If you are 10 minutes early, you are late." When attending a networking event, the most critical time is the half-hour of mingling before and after any planned program -- you can't meet people during the speaker's presentation. Arrive early and make effective use of that time.
4. **Succinctly Prepare 30-Second Commercial/Introductory Description of Yourself.** You are not your job title. Create a verbal picture of yourself in response to the "what do you do?" question.

For example, instead of saying, "I'm a lawyer" it would be more helpful to respond, "I help business owners to protect themselves against employment-related claims." OR "I help minimize risk for privately-held professional services firms." Much more interesting and memorable.

5. **Always Carry Business Cards.** This is how people "place" you within an organization. It is also a great way to extend a connection. In an effort to be helpful, you can jot down some useful tidbit of information on the back of your card to hand to a qualified prospect (i.e. name of a needed referral source for their business). To express your accessibility, you may write down your cell number on the back of the card or a web address for something useful to your contact.

At an event, keep business cards handy so you're not fumbling around trying to pull a dog-eared leftover out of an obscure compartment in your wallet. Plan your wardrobe on "event day" to ensure you can effortlessly pull out a card. Don't leave the office without them.

On the other side of this essential networking tool, it is much more important to gather business cards of others than to hand out yours indiscriminately. First, by asking a contact for their card expresses interest on your part to know that person better. Secondly, jotting down a distinguishing note about the contact on the back of their card will help you remember or "place" them for future reference. Third, having a business card of the folks you meet is imperative for follow-up activities. Don't let opportunity slip through your fingers by not gathering business cards of those you meet at networking events.