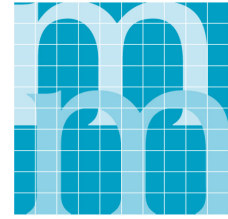


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I'm a speed networking novice ...Get me out of here!

by Margaret Cain



**M squared Corporate
Communications**

What would it be like? Would everyone be looking over my shoulder at the more interesting person next in line? Would I get the hard sell? Would I be able to give a good account of my own business?

As I drove to Sonning Golf Course in mid-November for the Success Network 'Energising the Business' event, I was feeling apprehensive. It was my first foray into speed networking.

A warm welcome and a cool glass of white wine later, I felt much better!

Once we were all gathered, Mary and Ute swiftly called us to order and lined us up in two rows to present our business to our counterparts with the ultimate in snappy elevator pitches.

And you know what? It was all infinitely easier and more fun than I'd envisaged. What a range of people I met – from Lynda with her management training to Hazel with her innovative water-coolers to Lorraine with her web-based allergy recipe business. From the volume of noise, you could tell we were giving it our best shot and everyone seemed to enjoy the experience. I was struck by how generous participants were in sharing the limited time available.

There were some familiar faces, too, and it was good to catch up, however briefly, and share business goals for 2009.

So, to anyone currently thinking "Speed networking? No thanks", I'd say give it a go. At a minimum, you'll meet some interesting people; at best, you have a wonderful opportunity to make some useful contacts – and who knows where that might lead?

From my extremely limited experience, I tentatively offer some speed networking tips...

7 speed networking tips

1. Do your homework – prepare your pitch so that you can communicate in a few punchy sentences the key benefits of your product or service.
2. Practise your mini-presentation (I won't tell if you rehearse in front of the mirror!).
3. Take lots of business cards – and have somewhere to tuck away the ones you collect. Have a pen handy, too, to write down any notes and actions on the back of the cards. This is not the time to be rooting around in your handbag!
4. Don't be too ambitious – aim to exchange essential information, not have an in-depth discussion. If you hit it off with someone, you can arrange to meet up again and start building the relationship.
5. Where areas of mutual interest could be usefully pursued, don't be shy – suggest a meeting. But watch the body language and make sure the other party is equally interested.
6. You may well encounter people who are potential competitors. Don't be defensive – are there opportunities to collaborate? Even comparing notes on the current state of the market or suppliers can be useful.
7. Of course, you'll remember to listen as well as talk. It's only polite and, after all, how can you present your business effectively if you don't understand theirs?

About the author

Margaret Cain of M squared Corporate Communications helps businesses and not-for-profit organisations to get their message across to clients, partners and employees, in print, over the web and in the media.

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