



It's not what you know, it's who you know

Networking may seem like an archaic concept, but making yourself known in the industry is vital to a successful business. Sarah Davies talks to ACE chairman, Sean Valentine to find out why it's so important

When I hear the word networking, images of 80s businessmen in power suits wielding mobile phones like bricks spring to mind. I think my negative associations with this concept stem from my childhood. That's right, my mother's unwanted advice regarding my career, or lack of, have tainted my view of what is widely regarded as business nirvana.

However, on reflection, this seemingly archaic concept is as important now as it ever was. In this economic climate, businesses have to compete to get work and networking is the ideal way to get noticed.

Despite the global domination of social networking sites like Twitter, face-to-face networking remains the most important way of keeping in touch with the industry.

Although using media sites rarely costs a penny, it seems that business owners would rather shell out their cash on networking in person, seeing it as a crucial element to the success of their business.

According to a survey carried out on 500 small businesses by Business Scene, 66% said that they are networking in person at least once a week and 25% said they had spent more than £1,000 on face-to-face networking in the last year.

"Someone recently said 'networking is life itself' and, on reflection, it is. Every single person in the world has been networking since they were a child, when they first started to converse with others," says Sean.

He's right – essentially it's just talking, which certainly

makes this concept more palatable to me. So why are we so reluctant to do something in the business arena that we do every day in our personal lives without thinking?

If you break it down it's just getting to know someone and creating a relationship, which you follow up by keeping in touch. Yes, it requires effort, but the potential rewards for your business are well worth it.

Sean is extremely positive about the subject: "During my 25 years in business I have found networking to be an invaluable part of the business mix. Getting out there and meeting people, enjoying events together and sharing common interest in a relaxed environment is the best way to build business."

Associations like ACE are the ideal vehicle to meet people in the industry, to catch up with existing contacts and make new ones. It provides a forum for individuals within the industry to exchange ideas, socialize and keep in touch through events it puts on annually.

"Networking is a lot like exercise," says Sean. "We know it's good for us, we just have too many excuses not to do it."

So now's the time to practice your best smile in the mirror, perfect your handshake and get networking. Remember, it's not about immediate gratification, but building the foundations for long-term associations.

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