

# Smart Ways to Use Your Business Card

Successful networking is "all in the cards" with these 4 strategies.

By Ivan Misner | May 22, 2006

Your business card is one of the most valuable networking tools you have in your quest for increased referrals. Can you envision a reality where 20 to 30 people in your word-of-mouth marketing circle carry your cards and have them ready to hand to prospects they're actually qualifying for you? I certainly can, and am excited every time I hear someone say, "Let me give you my friend's business card; oh, and by the way, may I have him (or her) give you a call?"

The business card is the most powerful single business tool--dollar for dollar--you can invest in. It's compact, energy-efficient, low-cost, low-tech, and keeps working for you hours, weeks and even years after it leaves your hands!

Some of the things your business card does are:

- Tell people your name and the name of your business
- Provide prospects with a way to contact you
- Give others a taste of your work, style and personality
- It can be so unusual or attractive or strange or charming or funny that it sticks in the memory like a great radio or television ad
- It can be reused, as it passes from person to person, giving the same message to each person who comes in contact with it

The two main functions of your card are to gain business from the person you give it to and to get your name out to other people with whom the first person comes in contact with via referrals. With that in mind, let's take a look at the most effective ways to use your business cards.

## **Make Your Cards Accessible in Every Situation**

In short, don't leave home without them! It's a great idea to keep a small box of your cards in your glove box, just in case you find yourself in a situation where you need more than you've carried in your pocket or purse. In addition to my jacket pocket, I tuck them away in my briefcase, wallet and computer bag, just to make sure I never run out.

Keep an eye on your supply. The time to reorder is before you're in danger of running out.

In addition to being sure *you* have your cards on hand, be sure that your networking partners always have your cards. Check with them regularly to see if they need more, and be ready to provide them with whatever quantity they say they need in order to promote you.

## **Seek Situations to Exchange Business Cards**

There are many opportunities in which you can pass on your card to prospective clients and customers as well as referral sources you wish to develop. Some are obvious; others are not. Whenever you have a **one-on-one meeting** with someone new or someone you haven't seen for a while, give her your business card. At **mixers and social events**, be sure you have plenty of cards when you go in. These are good places to extend the reach of your network.

**Conventions and trade shows** are another great venue for exchanging business cards. The vendors at the trade shows are anxious for you to take their card--don't make that a one-way street. Be sure you give them your card as well.

When you visit a **non-competing business** that might attract the same people you would like to have as customers, ask if you may leave a supply of cards to be handed out or made available. In most cases, a business that's complementary to your own is always looking for a networking partner. An example would be a sports nutritionist leaving a stack of cards at a martial arts studio. Be creative and consider even bringing your own cardholder to leave out.

**International meetings and events** can provide an opportunity to give out your business cards. Consider having your card printed double-sided, with English on one side and the language of the host country of the event on the other side.

### **Contacts at a Distance**

Whenever you communicate with someone in writing, send a card if it's appropriate to the occasion. Enclose several cards in every packet of sales material you mail out. Along with your thank-you note to the businessperson whose referral brought you a major contract, include a business card to replace the one she gave away, plus several more.

After any telephone call in which business was discussed, follow up with a letter outlining the main points of your discussion and include one or more of your cards. E-mail is a great way to follow up, but a letter will actually allow you to include your business cards.

### **Special Tricks of the Trade**

When giving out your card, hand-write something on one copy, such as your cell-phone number, a secondary e-mail address, etc. This will give that particular card a greater chance of being held onto. Be sure you give a couple of "clean" cards to that person, as well, and ask your new friend to pass one on to a potential customer.

After you get someone's card and have ended your time with her, make notes on the back of the card to jog your memory about something special that'll help you remember her. Don't do that in front of her, or you run the risk of making the impression that you are "forgetful." If you need to record information immediately during your discussion, such as telephone numbers or other data not on the card, use one of your own cards. You don't want her to think you view her card as scrap paper upon which to take notes.

At a restaurant, leave your card with the tip and write a personal thank-you note on the back or pay the highway toll for the Mercedes behind you, and leave your card for the driver!

The main thing when handing out your card is to keep in mind what an effective tool it can be. Take maximum advantage of its full potential. And never, ever, be caught out without it.