

# Be a Farmer, Not a Hunter When Networking

By Blair Entenmann, President, MarketingHelp! Inc.

In a business climate like today where decision makers want to buy, not be sold, you need to be a farmer, not a hunter. This means taking a low– pressure, highly visible approach at networking opportunities, not a hit- and- run sprint around the room with business cards. Here are some tips to make your networking more effective at business expos, trade shows, or professional or industry organization events.

**Plan your attitude before you go.** Enthusiasm is always an asset. Think about how you can best "invest" in the event personally and professionally. Be a giver, not a taker.

**Get there early and stay late.** This has many advantages. You get the host's attention, you learn things you might not otherwise, you get lots of conversation in and you score points for promptness.

**Make it easy for them to remember your name.** Nametags go on the right shoulder because during a handshake the eye easily follows the right hand up the shoulder. Say your name twice in the first 30 seconds of your contact with them. Don't be afraid to ask them to repeat their name several times if you can't read their nametag.

**Encourage people to talk to you.** The purpose of small talk is to make people feel comfortable. Act as if you were the host. Engage people by smiling at them, complimenting them, confirming what they're saying and finding shared interests. Pay good attention to the person you are speaking to. Treat them as if they were the most important person in the world.

**Be ready to exchange business cards.** Have them in a handy pocket so you can get one quickly, but don't force it on them. Look for an appropriate reason and time during your conversation to ask for theirs before you offer yours.

**Pick your spot in the room.** Pick a high traffic area such as between the bar, the food and the door. Be a center of influence, rather than wandering around too much. If people are encircling you to talk, important people that you want to talk to will notice and seek you out in curiosity (who is that and why are they important?).

**Be professional in your talk.** Avoid emotion–laden topics such as politics, religion, or sex. Tell non–offensive jokes. Don't excessively talk about company business in the presence of others. Acceptable topics are something about the occasion, how you each know the host, current events and asking about their business. Never complain about the food, the drinks or the host.

**Avoid monopolizing their time.** A good rule of thumb is don't talk to any one person longer than 10 minutes, but not shorter than 3 minutes. To detach yourself, introduce them to someone you know nearby, or move on after you have said something. Don't break away after the other person has just spoken.

These networking tips will help your image and visibility as well as attract prospective clients to your business. Good Luck!

Blair Entenmann is President of *MarketingHelp!*, a Grand Rapids based marketing firm specializing in helping clients catch and keep customers with better marketing strategies, programs and implementation. For more information, visit [www.mktghelp.com](http://www.mktghelp.com) or call 616-866-1198.