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The benefits of networking

No matter what stage you're at with your business, networking can be hugely beneficial. From prepping and attending to following up, we outline the things to consider so you're ready to get out and meet some new people.

Why do it

Networking can be daunting. It's tricky spending a couple hours away from your business or family to attend an event. And the idea of standing in a room full of strangers can be a bit overwhelming. So why go through it all?

Networking is not only good for your business; it also benefits you as a person.

Some of the reasons to network are:

- **Social connection and interaction** – especially if you work from home, it's good to get out and meet others. You don't have to go it alone.
- **Collaboration** – meet new suppliers or partners to help move your business forward.
- **Sales** – uncover new opportunities and customers to grow your business reach.
- **Advice** – connect with other businesses who have tackled the challenges you're working through or can put you in touch with someone who can help.
- **Improve your skills** – the opportunity to talk about your business, especially with new people, allows you to test and refine how you describe what you do. This can be especially helpful when you're first starting out and exploring new ideas.

[Owner-operators: Tips to beat isolation \(/news/small-business-stresses/\)](/news/small-business-stresses/)

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[Benefits of co-working \(/news/benefits-of-co-working/\)](/news/benefits-of-co-working/)

“Co-working spaces are great for networking on a regular basis. They offer an alternative to working from home and a place to connect with other businesses.”

James Walshe, owner of The Settlement, co-working and shared office spaces in Porirua and Petone, Wellington.

How to get started

Getting the most out of a networking event often starts before you arrive.

Find the right event

There are many organisations that offer networking events. You'll want to find the right kind of event for you and your business.

Groups or places that offer networking opportunities are:

- local business support, eg Regional Business Partner Network, chambers of commerce or

- economic development agencies
- business meetup groups
- industry associations
- conferences and trade shows
- co-working spaces
- corporates like banks or insurance providers
- schools and universities.

Ideally, your business goals will align with the place you network. For example, if you're looking to upskill your business awareness, a course or training programme might be a good way to meet people. PopUp Business School Aotearoa is an organisation that offers free courses throughout the country so you can learn more about business and meet others like you.

[About PopUp Business School\(external link\) \(https://www.rebelbusinessschool.nz/about.html\)](https://www.rebelbusinessschool.nz/about.html) — PopUp Business School Aotearoa

Prepare

Think about what you'd like to focus on and get out of the networking event. This will help keep you focused when you get in the room.

Before you attend a networking event, it might help to think about the following:

- How will you introduce yourself and your business?
- What are three key points you'd like someone to know about your business?
- Are there areas of your business you'd like help with?
- Are there opportunities to collaborate with new suppliers or other businesses?
- Are there new customer markets you'd like to explore?
- How can you make it easy for new contacts to follow up with you after the event, eg business cards, product samples?

Show up

Perhaps the most important part of networking is also the most difficult – showing up. Other business priorities or fears of not knowing anyone can keep you from going. But once you arrive and get into your first conversation or two, those hurdles will most likely disappear.

If you're feeling a bit unsure about meeting with new people, remember that others in the room have fears they're overcoming too. If you're feeling nervous, it can help to find the most friendly or outgoing person in the room and talk to them first. If they're in their element, their sense of ease will most likely rub off on you.

Introduce yourself

Each new person you meet offers a chance to get better at talking about your business. When people ask what you do, pay attention to how they receive your answer. If they ask questions to clarify certain points, think about how you might change your answer in the future.

Listen

When you're not talking, be a good listener. Listen to really hear what the other person is saying rather than listening to respond. Be sure to catch their name when they introduce themselves and ask for clarification if you didn't get it the first time. Checking you got someone's name right shows you're willing to make the effort to get to know them. And there is nothing more important to someone than their name.

Ask questions

Be curious in your conversations and ask questions. Yes/No questions are ok, but open-ended questions will give the other person a chance to elaborate. You can also ask questions that relate to the issues you're currently working through. This means you'll find out more about them and maybe learn about an opportunity.

Open-ended questions could be:

- Can you tell me more about...?
- How did you do that?
- What are you working on at the moment?
- Have you ever experienced this particular challenge?

Follow up

A big misconception about networking is that it ends when you go home. In reality, this first meeting should be the first conversation of many to come. Don't be afraid to ask someone for their business card or offer to shout them coffee. You never know where the next conversation might lead.

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