

Building Relationships

BUILDING BUSINESS

By Kenya McCullum

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Whether you are looking for a job or working to expand your business, networking is an essential part of achieving your goals. And with the current social networking craze, it has never been easier. With a click of a mouse, services like LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter help professionals connect with one another all over the world.

While this approach to networking may be easy and convenient, it is not necessarily the most effective. Searching for professionals with a certain job title and "friending" them alone does not build relationships and will not necessarily give you an edge when looking for clients, or a new job, because these new "friends" do not really know you.

BDMetrics, Inc. is currently developing technology for trade show professionals that will help users overcome this challenge by creating what Chief Product Officer, Don Mahoney, describes as "context." This will allow users to connect with other industry professionals based on common interests – such as the sessions they plan to attend at a conference – and create a dialogue that goes beyond name, rank and serial number.

"As people start participating in those types of conversations, you can recognize when a user has some particularly insightful comments on a topic of interest. Now you create an opportunity to connect with that person from the context of that discussion," said Mahoney. "Rather than just opening profiles for people and reach out to those with a particular profile, create context where meaningful relationships are introduced, and in some cases reintroduced, to bring value to the show."

The Face-to-Face Advantage

Online tools can help build a professional network when used thoughtfully, but in many ways they are no substitute for face-to-face interactions, which foster closer real-world connections.

"Networking implies friendship. People do not talk about that, but it implies that you build an amicable, friendly relationship with people and the only way you can do that is face to face," says consultant and show organizer, Bob Dallmeyer. "I know I can network online, but do I really know the people who are asking me to be their partner on LinkedIn or Facebook? No."

But Dallmeyer points out that even in a face-to-face setting, such as a networking event, you still need to be systematic when building your circle of contacts. Everyone who has attended one of these functions has witnessed the scene of some social butterfly buzzing around the room, indiscriminately passing out business cards to anyone and everyone who will take them. Even though that person is meeting a lot of people; that is not how you build a real relationship.

"That is not effective and does not get you anything unless they are looking for an undertaker or an insurance broker," Dallmeyer says jokingly. "That is like companies going to trade shows and they think if they get a business card from somebody that they have a solid business, which is foolish."

Networking Strategies

Getting the most out of networking can take some work, but the benefits can build exponentially – and when you do it right, it may even be fun.