



Business Networking Trends Survey - Winter 2009/2010

Overview

Networking is emerging as an important new way of marketing businesses cost effectively. Personal contact, introductions and referrals have always opened doors in business and face to face networking groups have existed to exploit this for many years

But has the growing popularity of online social networks been to the benefit or detriment of traditional methods of business networking?

Our second annual survey identifies the trends in face to face and online networking, enabling you to ensure that your own time is spent where the biggest benefits can be gained.

Executive Summary

Our research confirms that networking continues to play a key part in making small businesses successful. Entrepreneurs are most interested in using online networking sites to win more business, with over 80% reporting that they have achieved this to some degree. Further, 92% of respondents would recommend to their business contacts that they also network professionally online.

By contrast, using online networks for research, business advice or career development is of much less interest than a year ago. There is also a drop in the number of respondents holding the view that online networks help them get closer to customers. This suggests that the largest of the business focused social networks, LinkedIn and Xing, which focus their sites towards discussions and career development but offer few tools to broker real business, are poorly serving the small business community. It may be a function of the recession that entrepreneurs expect a much more tangible return from the time they invest online, with some concerns that not all networking sites may be delivering.

Nearly a quarter of small businesses are now using sites like Twitter for business networking. But 39% of small business professionals are wary of Facebook for business, refusing to mix their business contacts with their friends on the networking site; and two thirds of entrepreneurs are concerned about the security and integrity of online networks in general.

More traditional face to face networking continues to grow with 36% of respondents regularly attending networking meetings. In addition, the amount of money and time spent networking has also increased from a year ago. So, while the internet has opened up new ways for entrepreneurs to grow their businesses, with sites like WeCanDo.BIZ providing them valuable resources to do so, it is clear that more traditional forms of business networking still play a key role. Interestingly, whereas half of respondents plan to maintain the same levels of face to face networking activity in the year ahead, a slightly larger number (55%) plan to increase the time they dedicate to networking online.

In other key findings, the study reveals it continues to be smaller companies who are benefiting the most from modern networking opportunities. Over a third of our respondents are sole traders and 47% employ between two and 10 members of staff. Larger companies continue to be wary of using online networking to further their businesses.

It's enormously encouraging to see the growing interest in online networking as a new source of business by small business entrepreneurs, as this fits perfectly with our mission at WeCanDo.BIZ of delivering tools to broker valuable new business relationships. Our Twitter Sales Leads feature is already helping business people find new customers through more focused use of an increasingly valued networking resource. Our WeCanDoCRM Social CRM is also helping to ensure leads generated from networking online are effectively progressed to a close, along with leads gained face to face and through other marketing initiatives. WeCanDo.BIZ and our face to face networking partners maintain an excellent position to meet the evolving needs of clever entrepreneurs focused on the importance of personal relationships in growing healthy



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Survey conducted using WeCanDoCRM between 28 October 2009 and 19 January 2010.

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For more information on the author of this survey, please visit:

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The results

Legend to data fields

	% Total	Responses expressed as a percentage of the total sample answering the question
	Rank	Responses expressed in ascending order of popularity
	Count	Responses expressed as specific sample counts
	Change	Percentage change on last year (see Business Networking Trends Survey - Autumn 2008), factoring difference sample sizes
		* No comparison with last year as question new or substantially changed

1. What was the MAIN REASON you started business networking ONLINE?

	% of Total	Count	Change
I wanted more business	64%	122	+33%
I wanted to meet interesting new people	11%	21	+22%
I wanted to share my knowledge and other resources	6%	11	-33%
I wanted to find out what my customers/market were thinking	5%	10	-17%
I wanted business advice	4%	7	-64%
I work alone and needed interaction with others	4%	7	N/A
I wanted to advance my career	3%	6	0%
For search engine benefits	2%	3	N/A
I wanted to find out what my competitors and peers were up to	2%	3	-33%
I wanted to find new investors	1%	2	N/A
Sample size	100%	192	

2. How LONG have you been business networking online?

	% of Total	Count	Change
Less than 6 months	13%	24	-54%
6 - 12 months	24%	47	+20%
12 - 24 months	20%	39	+5%
24 - 36 months	14%	26	+40%
More than 36 months	29%	56	+26%
Sample size	100%	192	

3. Now, how would you rate these reasons for business networking ONLINE in order of importance to you?

	Rank	Participants were asked to rank each of the below in order of importance					Sample
		Most	Very	Quite	Minor	Unimp.	
Getting more business	1	91	60	28	11	2	192
Meeting interesting new people	2	32	70	50	27	8	187
Finding out what my customers/market are thinking	3	28	103	43	10	3	187
Search engine marketing	4	25	55	54	36	19	189
Sharing my knowledge and other resources	5	24	65	68	26	6	189
Finding out what my competitors and peers are doing	6	23	73	60	21	10	187
Getting business advice	7	16	61	65	38	7	187
Career advancement	8	10	26	38	50	60	184

4. Which of the following do you use for BUSINESS networking online?

	% of Total	Count
Business social networks (e.g. LinkedIn, Xing, Ecademy, WeCanDo.BIZ)	48%	93
Mainstream social networks (e.g. Facebook, MySpace, Bebo)	29%	55
Micro-blogs, lifestreaming and aggregators (e.g. Twitter, Friendfeed)	24%	46
Blogs (e.g. WordPress, Blogspot)	23%	45
General forums or communities (e.g. UK Business Forums, A1 Business Forums)	21%	41
Local or industry specific forums and communities	16%	31
Social media bookmarking sites (e.g. Digg, StumbleUpon)	11%	22
Video broadcast sites (e.g. YouTube)	9%	18
Self-built social networks (e.g. Ning, SocialGO)	9%	18
Podcasting	4%	7
Other	1%	2
Sample size		192

5. Do you mix business contacts with your friends, family and other social contacts on Facebook?

	% of Total	Count
Yes - I am happy to network with them all on Facebook	40%	61
Yes - But I keep them in separate groups	21%	32
No - I don't network with business contacts on Facebook	39%	59
Sample size		152

6. When we asked what your MAIN REASON was for starting to business network ONLINE (Question 1), do you feel that you have achieved this objective?

	% of Total	Count	*
Yes - I am staying focused on that objective	34%	65	
Yes - I now have a new objective	6%	12	
In part - I am staying focused on that objective	36%	70	
In part - I now have a new objective	5%	10	
No - I am staying focused on that objective	16%	31	
No - I now have a new objective	2%	4	
Sample size	100%	192	

7. Has business networking ONLINE brought you closer to your customers or market/intended market?

	% of Total	Count	Change
Yes	63%	120	-6%
No	38%	72	+15%
Sample size	100%	192	

8. Have you won new customers or otherwise done billable business as a direct result of business networking ONLINE?

	% of Total	Count	Change
Yes	55%	106	-7%
No	45%	85	+10%
Sample size	100%	191	

9. If you make purchases on behalf of your company, would you be likely to or have you already purchased from connections made through business networking ONLINE?

	% of Total	Count	Change
Yes - already purchased	32%	48	-29%
Yes - would purchase	56%	84	+2%
No	13%	19	+11%
Sample size	100%	151	

10. If you could do ONLY ONE of the following, which do you believe would generate more customers from scratch?

	% of Total	Count	*
Organised face to face business networking events	1	97	
Optimising your website/search engine marketing	2	40	
Networking online	3	23	
Telephone cold calling	4	12	
Sending e-mails	5	9	
Sending letters	6	6	
Exhibitions	7	5	
Door to door cold calling	8	0	
Sample size		192	

11. Would you recommend to your closest business contacts that they network ONLINE?

	% of Total	Count	Change
Yes	92%	176	0%
No	8%	15	0%
Sample size	100%	191	

12. Are you concerned about the security and integrity of ONLINE networks in general?

	% of Total	Count	*
Yes - very	19%	36	
Yes - slightly	47%	91	
No - not at all	34%	65	
Sample size		192	

13. Do you attend FACE TO FACE networking events in addition to networking online?

	% of Total	Count	Change
Regularly	52%	99	+36%
Sometimes	40%	75	-16%
Never	8%	15	-42%
Sample size	100%	189	

14. How much do your networking activities, BOTH online and face to face, cost you during a typical year (excluding your time)?

	% of Total	Count	Change
Nothing	10%	19	-37%
£1 - £100	17%	32	-15%
£101 - £300	21%	40	+10%
£301 - £500	13%	25	-13%
£501 - £1,000	17%	32	0%
More than £1,000	23%	43	+53%
Sample size	100%	191	

15. How much time EACH MONTH do you typically spend on your networking activities, BOTH online and face to face?

	% of Total	Count	Change
I don't spend any time networking	0%	0	-100%
1-2 hours per month	3%	5	-57%
2-5 hours per month	11%	20	0%
5-10 hours per month	27%	48	+35%
10-20 hours per month	20%	37	-20%
20-50 hours per month	24%	44	+4%
More than 50 hours per month	15%	27	+25%
<i>Sample size</i>	100%	181	

16. Of the TIME you spend on networking activities, how is that time split between online networking and face to face networking?

	% of Total	Count	Change
All online	4%	7	*
Mostly online	39%	74	
Equally split	24%	46	
Mostly face to face	33%	64	
All face to face	1%	1	
<i>Sample size</i>	100%	192	

17. Which method of business networking do you see as the most cost effective?

	% of Total	Count	Change
Face to face	54%	103	+10%
Online	46%	88	-10%
<i>Sample size</i>	100%	191	

18. How do you plan to change your ONLINE business networking activity over the next 12 months?

	% of Total	Count	Change
I plan to increase it	55%	106	+6%
I don't - it will stay about the same	42%	81	-6%
I plan to decrease it	2%	4	-33%
<i>Sample size</i>	100%	191	

19. How do you plan to change your FACE TO FACE business networking activity over the next 12 months?

	% of Total	Count	Change
I plan to increase it	46%	88	-13%
I don't - it will stay about the same	50%	96	+19%
I plan to decrease it	4%	7	-20%
<i>Sample size</i>	100%	191	

20. What is your role in the organisation you work for?

	% of Total	Count	Change
Owner/proprietor/shareholder	77%	147	*
Board member/director	6%	12	
Senior manager (with budgetary responsibility)	6%	12	
Manager (without budgetary responsibility)	2%	3	
Sales/business development/marketing	8%	16	
Administrative/operational	1%	1	
Technical	1%	1	
<i>Sample size</i>	100%	192	

21. How many staff does your organisation have in total?

	% of Total	Count	Change
Just me	35%	68	+6%
2 - 10	47%	90	+2%
11 - 50	12%	23	+20%
51 - 100	1%	2	-50%
101 - 250	2%	4	0%
251 - 500	0%	0	-100%
501 - 1,000	0%	0	0%
More than 1,000	3%	5	0%
<i>Sample size</i>	100%	192	

22. Where are you located?

	% of Total	Count	Change
UK	88%	164	+6%
Europe (other)	5%	9	-38%
North America	3%	6	-25%
Australia/New Zealand	0%	0	-100%
India	2%	3	+100%
Asia (other)	3%	5	+200%
Latin America	0%	0	0%
Middle East	0%	0	0%
Africa	0%	0	0%
<i>Sample size</i>	100%	187	

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