



# Smart Networking

End the Resistance,  
Prepare for Success and  
Get 24/7 Results  
Without the 24/7 Effort

Liz Lynch



# Networking is Easier Than You Think

What would you strive to accomplish if you knew you had the support of the right people? Would you finally quit your job and become your own boss? Expand your business in a totally new direction? Attempt a whole new profession altogether? Whatever path you dream of pursuing, there are people out there who can help. So why aren't you meeting them?

The traditional view of networking that many hold is a narrow one. Not something you'd do unless you needed a new job, or perhaps a favor. But those who really understand the power of a network know how that power can be harnessed for so much more. And yet, even if the idea of having a lifelong support system to help you through any goal you would want to strive for is highly appealing, the thought of what you might have to go through to build it isn't. So you put your big goals on the backburner, and wake up Monday morning in the same place you were the Monday before, and the Monday before that.

Though it may be hard to grasp, networking is much easier than you think. Forget the myth that you need to be an extrovert to network well. You don't. Or that you must network nonstop. Absolutely not. Or that networking is all about working the room at a big event with a big fake grin plastered on your face. Far from it.

As an introvert, networking isn't something that came naturally to me, and I avoided it for as long as possible. Not until I left corporate America in October 2000 to start my own business did I have to learn to embrace it. But as chief, cook and bottle washer for my new company, I was also strapped for time. So when I started to figure out how to network, I automatically looked for ways to expend less time and energy while still getting results.

Which shortcuts could I take? How could I multi-task? What's most important? What's nice to do, but not that critical? The more focused and strategic I was about the process, the better quality relationships I built, and the more my business grew.

Right from the start I learned to network smart so I didn't have to network hard. I could get in, get out, and get back to work. And you can make the leap too. All that's required is a shift in your mindset and an understanding of the key principles of smart networking.

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## BROADEN YOUR VIEW OF HOW YOUR NETWORK CAN HELP

Much of what holds people back from networking is a lack of understanding how broad a role their networks can play in helping them succeed in today's world. So many professionals are stuck on the idea that networking is just about job hunting or selling that they can't see tapping into their contacts for any other reasons. But, in fact, leveraging our networks can help us mitigate a variety of challenges we face every day:

**Information overload.** With more information coming at us from more sources and more devices, we need help sorting, filtering, and making sense of it quickly. Access to experts and a variety of opinions will help us get our questions answered quickly, find untapped opportunities, make better decisions and be more effective in our jobs.

**Commoditization.** Our prospects are facing information overload too. We need to be able to break through the clutter so that those who need to know about our work take notice. The contacts in our network are our extra eyes and ears in the market, channeling opportunities to us wherever they see a need, and recommending our products and services. When everything else is equal, a strong endorsement from a trusted source can tip the scales in our favor.

**Increasing demands on time.** To compete in a faster-paced world, we need to get more done in a shorter amount of time. No one can do it all anymore. We have to parallel process and gather support and resources. We also have to cut to the chase and look for reasonable shortcuts. Instead of spending more hours in the office gathering and analyzing information, a phone call to the right source can save us a great deal of time.

**Lack of security.** Despite how well we may be performing, fat and happy isn't forever. No matter how comfortable we are now or how secure we may feel, any number of forces completely out of our control can change our situation. Overnight, thousands of Lehman employees lost their jobs

and small business owners lost access to credit. Relationships give us the flexibility and support to adapt when the rug is pulled out from under us. They can help us get back on our feet more quickly.

When we open our eyes to how much our networks can help us—if we let them—we'll start to place a higher value on our relationships and take better care of them. Not only will we improve our networking skills in the process, but we'll also strengthen our connections and ensure our contacts will be there when we need them.

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## BREAK OUT OF YOUR COMFORT ZONE

Change is hard. But change that *you* initiate is easier to manage than change that's forced on you. Sooner or later, networking will be a part of your life, by your choice or someone else's. When *you* make the decision, you have more control over both the timing and the method. This will keep networking from becoming overwhelming and stressful, and greatly improve your overall results. And the sooner you start, the sooner you can reap the benefits.

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You might take comfort in knowing that you already have a base level of contacts and connections already, no matter how small it may be. Anyone outside of your family that you potentially can call on for support, insight and advice is in your network. Now, you may not know how to tap into your network effectively, or be comfortable asking for help. And you may not have all the people you need or have a methodical way of adding them effortlessly and deliberately. But having that base level of networking contacts means you already have a base level of networking skills to build on.

You might be waiting for a bolt of confidence to strike before you get up enough courage to put yourself out there, but confidence doesn't magically appear. Instead, confidence comes partly through knowledge, being able to see what the process looks like and knowing intellectually that it's all very doable. But confidence also comes from trusting yourself, taking a deep breath and plunging right in. Once you have the experience of re-surfacing not just unscathed and intact, but more significantly, with one or two small successes under your belt, you'll wonder why you ever waited so long to get started.

## LEARN HOW NETWORKING IS DIFFERENT TODAY... AND USE THAT TO YOUR ADVANTAGE

In many ways, networking is the same as it's always been: building rapport with someone, getting to know each other through conversation, staying in touch, and finding ways to help. The big difference is that before the Internet, we were limited to networking within our own geographies and primarily face-to-face. Now, the whole world is open to us and we can do business with people we've never met, or even spoken to on the phone.

There's good news and bad news to this depending on you look at things. For some, building relationships remotely is more comfortable than face-to-face interaction, so taking some of their networking online will be a big relief. For others who enjoy the tried and true structure of in-person networking groups and events, the adjustment to newer, more self-directed online networking can take some getting used to.

Online networking can seem like the Wild West, but here are some things that can help take the saddle sores out of your journey:

**Prepare to share.** People are making decisions about whether to network with you based on what information is available. You can easily build a mountain of evidence in your favor by sharing your knowledge and expertise on your business blog, and by filling out your online profiles on the social networking sites you belong to so others can learn more about you. Because we expect to find information online about the people and companies we're interested in, a dearth of it can leave you vulnerable to competitors who are maximizing these channels.

**Keep the bikini shots offline.** At the same time, be aware of sharing too much information about yourself. While your washboard abs may get attention, it's probably not the kind you're looking for. You want to present yourself professionally at all times, and preferably, fully clothed.

**Dial down the sales persona.** When networking face-to-face, you never want to come across as sales-y, more interested in pushing your product than building a true relationship. Online, it's even more important that you take the time to integrate yourself into the community and interact with other members, rather than start to blast sales messages just because you can. Remind yourself that there's a real person behind every online profile, not a dollar sign.

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**Adapt your communication.** With more ways to communicate, many people are developing their own preferences for staying in touch. In person meetings and phone call follow ups have been supplemented by opt-in emails, mobile texting, blog commenting, and direct messaging through social networking sites. Finding out how your contacts prefer to be contacted will increase your chances of getting a favorable response every time.

**Keep tabs on your time.** It's easy to spend too much time online or too little. Finding the right balance can be difficult at first. To leverage online tools, you need to actively use them. Setting up your blog or online profile and sitting back waiting for your inbox to chime is just as futile as paying your membership dues to a networking group, but never going to any meetings. Without the structure of monthly events, you need to make your own time to connect with other members on the site. At the same time, you need to focus on the highest impact activities so you use your time wisely.



**Remember that everything is on the record.** On occasion, you may feel a strong urge to post a sarcastic comment or write a harsh private message. While live conversations can usually remain private, just about any online communication can resurface and come back to haunt you. Always put your best self forward, take the high road, and don't put anything in writing online that you wouldn't want to see on the front page of *The New York Times*.

In many ways, networking today is easier than it's ever been. With the open lines of communication and readily-available information, people can find their way to you and sell themselves on working with you without much intervention on your part. If you're comfortable with these new rules, or can easily adapt to them, you'll thrive in this environment.

Yet, while online tools can automate and facilitate a lot of your networking, face-to-face interaction is still important. Sometimes the best place to connect, or re-connect with someone you really want to reach is in person, and you want to have the skills to maximize those opportunities. Starting online, however, can help you gain confidence in your connection skills and help take the edge off when that first meeting occurs.

## NETWORK SMARTER, NOT HARDER

Consistent participation with networking is one of the keys to ensuring your contacts will be there to help when you need them. But, you can't spend all your time networking, and even if you could, you probably wouldn't want to. That's where smart networking comes in.

Smart networking is for anyone interested in generating networking leverage. Instead of having to network actively 24/7 to bring in a steady stream of results, by integrating face-to-face contact with online social media, you can be in more places at once and attract opportunities automatically.

### **Smart networking works because it:**

**...is driven by purpose.** When most people begin networking, they approach it haphazardly, showing up at events and meeting whoever happens to be there. Smart networking starts by defining our goals. These goals should then determine whom we ought to have in our network, which in turn, should help us decide where best to meet them. We don't waste time at the wrong events or in following up when it's not the right fit.

**...adds value and removes pressure.** Even though clarifying our objectives is important, we never lead a conversation with what we want. Instead, smart networking puts a deliberate focus on the needs and feelings of other people first. Without the transactional churn and burn mentality, people stay in our network longer and are more willing to help us when we need it. We don't need to build a huge Rolodex if we build a responsive one.

**...leverages tools that multiply our productivity.** Rather than meeting people and interacting with them one-to-one, smart networking takes advantage of online tools and services that help us reach people on a one-to-many basis. They also make us available to network around the clock. People can learn about us and communicate with us at any time of day. In effect, we're always ready, willing and able to network, even when we're asleep.

**...pulls people into our orbit.** A common complaint with networking is that it's time consuming. Making connections, following up, learning more about each other, and discussing ways to work together all take time. Smart networking, on the other hand, helps us take shortcuts by attracting people already primed to work with us. They've learned about our expertise by what we've shared through blogging, social networking and other visibility strategies, and they know how we would fit into what they're doing. This saves us enormous time and energy compared to knocking on every door ourselves and starting every conversation from square one.

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## ARE YOU READY FOR SMART NETWORKING?

In truth, smart networking isn't any more difficult than regular networking, but it does require more thought and preparation before you put yourself out there. Ironically, few people bother to do this advanced groundwork, but it's exactly this preparation that will make the rest of your networking activities smoother and easier. Smart networking also calls for a multi-channel approach, integrating in person or online strategies appropriately for maximum effectiveness.

# Smart networking requires more thought and preparation before you put yourself out there.

If you've finally made the commitment to yourself to learn to network once and for all, or if you're looking for a way to take your relationship building skills to the next level, jump onto the path towards smart networking:

**First, get into the right mindset.** You need an internal guidance system to help you navigate through different situations that might come up, and give you the foundation to make the actual techniques work. Understanding the value of networking in your life and being willing to try things that might be uncomfortable at first will get you over the hump.

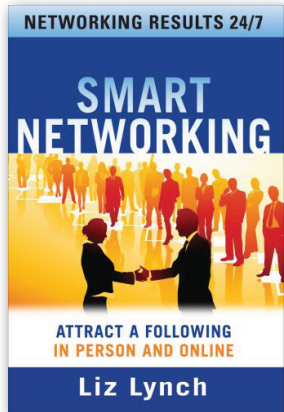
**Second, perfect your one-to-one skills.** With all that we can do online and over the phone nowadays, connecting live one-to-one seems expensive and time consuming by comparison. Yet, in some cases, it's still highly valuable to reach out to someone in person. You want to make sure that every time you have a face-to-face interaction, you can take full advantage of the opportunity. This means being able to introduce yourself with impact to automatically attract the people you're looking

for, knowing how to start relationships off on the right foot, and understanding how to nurture those relationships over the long term.

**Third, leverage platforms to network one-to-many.** You can turbo charge your networking overall by supplementing or transitioning some of your one-to-one connection strategies with those that get you in front of more people on a one-to-many basis. Build some visibility and an online presence to get known more broadly and deeply. Boosting your name recognition will help attract more people and more possibilities into your life without extra effort on your part.

**And finally, choose the right mix of activities for YOU.** While there are many different ways to build relationships in person and online, you don't want to pack your day with nonstop networking. You have real work to do. It's important, therefore, to choose the appropriate strategies based on what you want to achieve, and taking into account which activities you might enjoy most. Then develop a game plan and schedule to keep yourself on track

Who are you serving by continuing to put your dreams on hold? The people who can change your life and transform those dreams into reality are out there. You just need to meet them. What are you waiting for? 📌



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Liz Lynch is the author of *Smart Networking* (McGraw-Hill 2008). She is also the founder of the Center for Networking Excellence, a company that develops products, programs and seminars to help entrepreneurs and professionals get clients, build their businesses, and accelerate their careers through networking. Before pursuing an entrepreneurial path, Liz worked at some of the top firms in their industries—Goldman Sachs, Disney, Booz Allen & Hamilton, and Time Warner—to hone her strategic, analytical and financial expertise. She holds an engineering degree from the University of California, Berkeley and an MBA from Stanford University. For more information, please visit [www.NetworkingExcellence.com](http://www.NetworkingExcellence.com).

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