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No more networking nerves

In advance of Sussex's first speed networking event, Wired Sussex gives its top tips for successful schmoozing

1. Be prepared
2. Be interested as well as interesting
3. Work the room
4. Follow up
5. Smile and enjoy yourself

The most confident people can suffer from nerves when faced with a room full of strangers. Often the temptation is to remain in your comfort zone and talk only to people you know, but this is not the aim of any networking event – so make the most of it and enjoy yourself!

Networking is a useful exercise for many reasons. It can be a vital step in looking for a new job, is one of the most effective ways to find new business contacts and can also help to expand your social group. It's useful to remember the adage *people buy people*, and networking events are the ideal opportunity to sell yourself.

So how can you combat your fears and become a confident and successful networker? By following a few simple rules, you'll soon find yourself eagerly anticipating the next opportunity to flex your networking skills.

Wired Sussex, the business development agency for Sussex new media companies, suggests these tips:

1 – Be Prepared

One thing guaranteed to bring you out in a cold sweat is the feeling of being out of your depth. The best way to overcome this is to do your homework prior to the event.

If possible, try visiting the venue beforehand, so the surroundings are familiar on the day. Ask if there is a dress code, as being over or under dressed is bound to make you feel uncomfortable.

Try and find out who else will be attending, and carry out some research into their company and interests. This will help to keep the conversation flowing, and will impress even the most hardened networker.

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Go armed with business cards, and take along supportive documents, such as a company brochure or your portfolio of work, if you feel this is appropriate.

If you are hunting for employment, make sure you have an updated CV to send out first thing the next day, and that you are aware of the issues currently facing your industry.

2 – Be interested as well as interesting

As well as having plenty to say, it's important to remember the value of listening. It's a well-known fact that people like to talk about themselves, and some of the most successful networkers are those who let others lead the conversation.

Pay close attention to the people you converse with and try to remember a few key facts. Make a note of the people you meet and potential partnerships when you get home (or during convenient breaks), so that you can drop them into conversation the next time you meet.

There is nothing more flattering than someone finding you interesting enough to remember your last conversation, and nothing worse than someone looking over your shoulder for the next target whilst you're talking!

3 – Work the room

Make an effort to speak to as many people as possible, and don't just hone in on the delegates you think will be most useful to you. By giving everyone equal time and attention, you will make them feel valued, and you never know when someone may be in a position to help you in the future.

4 – Follow up

If you have promised to send information to someone, make sure it's the first thing you do when you return to your desk. This demonstrates your interest and reliability, and ensures they will remember who you are.

If the event was more of a social occasion, just sending an email or text to your new contacts saying how nice it was to meet them will help to consolidate the relationship.

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5 – Smile and enjoy yourself!

Everyone looks more attractive and approachable when they are smiling, so people will be more inclined to talk to you if you look happy. Monitor the rest of your body language too - keep your arms loose, your shoulders back and maintain eye contact with people.

Remember, networking shouldn't be a chore, so make the most of the occasion and let your personality shine through.

Get out there

Now you know how to maximise each networking occasion, you just need an opportunity to put it all into practice. Research events in your local area and try to attend at least one a month – take a friend or colleague along to give your confidence a boost and provide you with that extra element of support.

If you live in the Sussex area, try Wired Sussex's informal monthly networking night, Wired Ventures. Held on the last Thursday of the month (next on 25 September) at Sumo in Brighton, each event features different speakers, who share their experiences and views on a range of topics relevant to the new media sector.

For more information on Wired Sussex or Wired Ventures visit www.wiredsussex.com.

Ends

Notes to editors

About Wired Sussex

Wired Sussex is the business development agency that was established in 1997 to support the vibrant new media cluster in Sussex with a range of business services. Services include networking events, international, national and regional business development, industry guides, training and a regional job vacancy board – see www.wiredsussex.com for further details. More than 750 companies currently use these services.

Having successfully established a Sussex-based organisation focused on the new media industry, Wired Sussex's model has now been replicated in five other regions of the South East.

Wired Sussex is backed by the resources of Sussex Enterprise.

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