

Networking Can Change Your Life . . . If You Take it Seriously

By Barbara Brabec

One of the best definitions of networking I've ever found came from a book in the 1980s by the late Mary Scott Welch, who said: "Networking is a concept that can change your whole way of thinking about what it takes to succeed in business. It is a technique that will introduce you to stimulating, knowledgeable allies you didn't know you had. It's the process of developing and using your contacts for information, advice and moral support as you pursue your career."

I was already an avid networker when I read those inspiring words, but now they have even greater importance to me because I can look back on my business life and see dozens of important milestones in my life that were a direct response of my networking with someone who connected me to someone else at just the right time, or guided me to a new door I had been searching for.

That old saying that it's not what you know but WHO you know really is true. Some of the smartest established business people I know are still struggling today because they lack the power that comes only from networking business relationships that have been nourished over a period of time. If this describes you, take heart, because it's never too late to start networking in earnest, and just one important contact made *today* could change your life tomorrow.

Starting or Expanding a Business Network

A network is simply a group of supportive people who are interested in one another and willing to help each other succeed. In her book, Welch pointed out that each of us is set smack-dab in the middle of a vast network, whether we realize it or not. So whether you're just starting to network or trying to enlarge an existing one, you first need to decide what it is that you want to accomplish through networking—which, coincidentally, is the same question you must always ask yourself before you try to get publicity.

Do you need marketing or business information, contact with certain individuals in your industry, business leads, new clients, paying customers, technical information, or just encouragement and moral support? You may need several networks to get everything you want, and if a needed network hasn't been formed yet, start it by gathering together a few friends and colleagues.

A shrewd businessperson knows *everybody* worth knowing, but such people aren't likely to contact you unless you let them know you *want* to be contacted. To succeed in your field, experts say you should know—and be well-known by—at least the one-hundred most important people in your field. *Can you even identify these people?*

One networking expert suggests that we all need a core group of between five and eight people who are vital to our success in different ways, including a mentor . . . someone who will encourage us . . . someone who's an idea genius . . . someone who will always tell us the truth . . . and someone who is savvy about getting new business. Whenever you meet someone new who seems like a good networking prospect, look for common ground. Find out what this person excels in and what his or her interests are. Don't be afraid to ask questions of someone you have only just met, but do preface your questions with information about yourself. It's always best to reveal yourself before expecting others to reveal themselves.

Developing Business Relationships

Of course, establishing contacts will do you little good unless you get important people *involved with you* so that you will be well-known to them. This is what is known as “relationship networking,” and it's a concept that dramatically shaped the development of my business career as a writer, publisher, speaker, consultant, and editor, and one that continues to impact it today.

The rule here is that you must constantly, consistently, and deliberately maintain all of your important networking contacts—with email messages or real letters, with promotional newsletters or ezines, with telephone calls, with online meetings, and personal visits if at all possible. Having a website and related blog will definitely make your communications job easier. Yes, all this networking (work without pay) is going to take time, but that time could later translate to financial and personal profits beyond your wildest imagination.

Another important rule: You must TRADE information, not merely take it. And always strive to always give more than you get. It's fine to ask a networking pal who they know that might be helpful to you, but be sure to thank them for that lead by later referring someone you know who needs to know them. The bottom line here is that the more helpful you are to others, the more helpful they will be to you—a concept that is directly related to word-of-mouth advertising.

TIP: If you're an expert who is constantly being contacted by newbies who want to pick your brain but have nothing to offer you in the way of useful help or information, then you must charge them a consulting fee because you're not in business simply to give away everything you've learned the hard way.

The Butterfly Effect

Just as a butterfly's wings can create tiny changes in the atmosphere that may ultimately cause a tornado to appear or *not* appear ([see Wikipedia](#)), networking with a large number of others who share your dreams and goals can cause a chain of events that can lead to a "large-scale phenomena."

It has been said that we're all only three people away from the person we really need to meet—whether for business or personal reasons. When I look back on my personal life, for example, I see that my music teacher in Chicago introduced me to a young percussionist who would later introduce me to his drummer friend, [Harry Brabec](#), who swept me off my feet and married me three weeks later.

If we already have a good business network going, we may sometimes be only a couple of people away from the one person we need at that time to advance our dreams, goals or business. For example, I got my first book contract when a competitive crafts magazine publisher with whom I'd been networking introduced me to a book publisher who wanted a book she wasn't interested in writing. That book, *Creative Cash*, became a best-seller and led me to write several other books that led directly to a lifetime of successful self-employment.

It's clear to me that if I hadn't "flapped my wings" by networking aggressively, I might never have become a published author, and the course of my entire professional life would have been vastly different. Certainly I wouldn't be involved in electronic and POD publishing now if not for the help and encouragement I've received from writer/publisher networking pals on the Web.

Use the Many Networking Resources at Hand

I think we all know that business-to-business networking is one of the most successful marketing strategies a Web entrepreneur can use, but lately a new kind of networking has taken the Web by storm. It's called "social networking," and it's something that entrepreneurs all over the world are learning to use to advance their businesses. It's part of a whole new movement on the Web called Web 2.0, which [Wikipedia](#) explains is a new way of using the Internet as a platform to do many other things. It includes all kinds of interactive websites, including social networking and social bookmarking sites, weblogs (blogs), [wiki software](#), podcasts, RSS feeds (and other forms of many-to-many publishing), social software, and web application programming interfaces. For more information on Web 2.0 topics, business-to-business networking, and the plain old kind of networking that changed my life, do a few keyword searches for these topics in your favorite Web browser.

Remember what I said earlier: *It's never too late to start networking in earnest, and just one important contact made today could change your life tomorrow.*

Take it from an old homebiz pro who has been there, done that . . . you CAN realize your dreams and achieve new goals by getting serious about networking and connecting with others who can help you up the ladder of success.

So don't just sit there.

Write a letter.

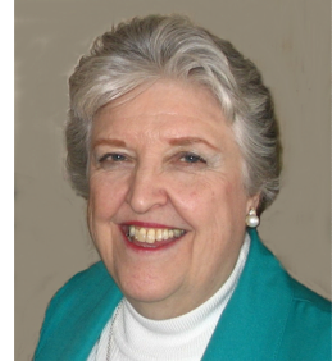
Send an email.

Pick up the phone.

Do some serious wing-flapping today!

About the Author

Self-employed for most of her adult life, Barbara Brabec has long been one of America's best known and most trusted home-business authors. A pioneer in the home-business and crafts industries, she first began to work with and write about craftspeople and home business owners in 1971. She published a subscription newsletter for fifteen years and was a popular speaker and workshop leader at home-business conferences across the country until the late nineties. No longer active in the crafts or home-business industries, Barbara is currently moving in new directions as a [book manuscript editor](#), writer and self-publisher. She also offers a [telephone consulting](#) service for beginning and established home-business owners, writers, and self-publishers.



Barbara published [her first memoir](#) in 2010, titled *The Drummer Drives! Everybody Else Rides—The Musical Life and Times of Harry Brabec, Legendary Chicago Symphony Percussionist and Humorist*. A second memoir is planned for publication in 2011.

[Barbara's trade books](#) include *Homemade Money* and *Creative Cash*, both of which have achieved classic status over the years. Other books include *Handmade for Profit*, *The Crafts Business answer Book*, and *Make it Profitable*. Two additional self-published books are now out of print. (Some of Barbara's personal writing and publishing experiences are discussed in the [Writing/Publishing department](#) of her website.)

Barbara has also published the popular eBook, [Secrets to Maximizing Schedule C Deductions](#).

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