

Networking: what's your elevator pitch?

Do you look forward to networking events or would you rather tidy your sock drawer? For some people networking is a lot of fun while for others it's an ordeal. Yet it's a given that networking helps you put your business out there and keeps you in touch with leads and new ideas.

So... you've responded to the email from your local Chamber of Commerce inviting you to their next after 5 business networking event. The room is crowded and buzzing. You have a glass in your hand, a smile on your face and 30 seconds before the gaze of the person you're speaking with starts to drift.

One thing that can help is being confident you can say what makes your business special. This is sometimes called the 'elevator pitch', because you should be able to deliver it to a hypothetical stranger in a lift between the time the doors close on the ground floor and the time they open again on the top floor ('lift pitch' has somehow never caught on). You want something short, sparky and persuasive so your listener asks 'tell me more'. You can use elevator pitches in different situations. You might use one internally in your business to fire up your team about a new project. In a networking situation, use it to reach out to a prospective customer or collaborator, so they know what you do and what your business can offer them.

When you know you're going to a networking event, think about what you say when you meet people:

- § What's your goal? Do you want to tell potential customers about your business? Do you have a great new product or service you want to introduce?
- § What do you do? What's the customer point of view on your business? How does it make their life easier or better? If you can lay out some numbers showing the value in what you do, all the better (though don't overdo it)
- § Whom do you do it for? Is there a key market, such as builders or healthcare professionals? Can you refine this, maybe by specifying the scale of the businesses you serve ('small to medium sized') or characterising them by the challenges they face - 'time-poor small business owners'?
- § Why should they care? What problem can you solve? Try phrases like 'who are looking for' or 'so they can'. Focus on how your business helps people and say which people. For example, 'we develop apps for businesses with roving staff who need easy access to client and financial information'

What makes you different? This is your unique selling proposition (USP). Why are you the better choice? Does your business offer something truly one of a kind or is your USP a combination of quality, service and/or convenience?

Think about how you say it, as much as what you say. Say it out loud until it feels natural. Make sure you feel good about it. If what you do excites you, chances are others will respond to that.

The next step? Listen. Ask questions. Don't let your eyes wander, checking for someone more interesting. That's a first impression you don't want to create. The elevator pitch is where you can make that important first connection. After that, you have a chance to deepen the connection and build a relationship as your next phase of networking.