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## Hybrid Networking: Key for Success in 2009

They say necessity is the mother of invention. Leave it to a near frozen central Massachusetts resident to figure out how to power his house with his Prius hybrid car, given the electric company was nowhere to be found. Where else can this hybrid mentality of leveraging resources, and combining effective tools be applied?

Networking! You've heard it a zillion times - no one can predict what kind of a year 2009 will be. So it is time to get creative!

Here are a few ways to network: speaking, writing, attending events, online sites (e.g. LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter), being on a committee, and volunteering, just to name a few. It is important to identify what you like to do, what is a match given your personality, and what has the best return.

Create a plan that manages the three resources we all have: time, energy, and money. Time is equal for everyone. Energy and money are variable. This will be the year of wise spending of all three.

First, keep in mind the difference between a database and a network. A database is a list of people and their contact information. The people who return your call comprise your network.

Let's start with face-to-screen networking, and discuss online methods:

- LinkedIn:
  - Research Tool: For example, I speak at conferences where often the meeting planners select the speakers. Knowing this, in my research, I search for the position "meeting planner" on LinkedIn. Next, I go hybrid. I pick up the phone and contact the person we have in common and connect with them. I then find out if they know the meeting planner and ask for an introduction.
  - Accepting invitations: Some people accept anyone who asks to be connected. That is your decision. For me, I want to strategically manage those connections and people I know, have met, or have been referred to. My LinkedIn profile includes guidelines for the best ways (and reasons) for people to contact me.
  - Privacy: My LinkedIn network is closed, only people within the network can see whom I know. This prevents people from "shopping" in my network and helps to alleviate the awkward conversation of rejecting a request for an introduction.
  - Think of LinkedIn as a place where you want to be in business attire and in professional mode.

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- Facebook:
    - It is a place that can be professional but social connections are its primary purpose.
    - I accept most anyone who asks. Just like a random conversation on a plane or at a party. I will have the conversation – doesn't mean we are going to be best friends.
    - Facebook is an environment where you are fine showing up in jeans, but not necessarily sloppy (or slutty) ones. Think of the awkward feeling of running into someone from the office when you were out partying. You want to avoid that on Facebook.
    - While it is social, it is not a license to be ... well, stupid! Remember, what is put on Facebook, stays on Facebook – even if you delete it.
  - Twitter – This is a website where you can “microblog.” You have 140 characters to say something. The jury is out on this one. It is too new for me to really have an opinion. If you want to “follow me” on Twitter, my handle is “DianeDarling.”
  - Meetup – This is one of my favorites because its entire purpose is to blend online and offline networking. Their theme is less face-to-screen and more face-to-face networking. Topics run the gambit from entrepreneurship to single parenting. Some are like mini-classes. This is a very resourceful tool.
  - Writing – Contribute to an article or write a blog to start out. If you feel you have enough information to write a book, but you do not like the writing process, you can partner with a ghost writer.
  - E-introductions – Connect people to each other. This is often overlooked as an amazing way to reach out to those you have not spoken to in awhile. You become a networking node when you connect people, and others appreciate this.

Now let's talk about in-person networking:

- Speaking – This is a remarkable way to network, especially for introverts. In an instant you are “meeting” everyone in the room. Yet you have avoided the agony of walking up to clusters of people and attempting small talk. If the idea of speaking terrifies you, start with being on a panel, introducing the speaker, or ask a question at an event. I took acting classes to get over my fear of being a speaker. Or try Toastmasters.

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- Volunteer – This is one of my favorite ways to network. Why? Since I am not being paid, I can stretch my skills and do something I am not currently qualified to do. I get to meet people who are out of my typical networking circles and expand who I know and how I know them. My suggestion is to volunteer to do something you do not get paid for. For example, if you are an attorney, volunteer to be on the marketing committee. The origins of Effective Networking date back to many a volunteer relationship.
  - Membership Organizations – This can be the chamber of commerce, a leads group, or an association of like-minded people in either your profession, demographic, or interests. Join these but do not join them all. Attend a few as a guest and see if you like the group. Do you feel welcome? Is there an opportunity for you to volunteer and get some visibility? What is the time commitment?
  - Events – Candidly, I have a love/hate relationship with events. If I am speaker, it is fine. I have a job to do, I do it well, and I know it works for the attendees. If I do not have a job at an event, it is very easy for me to skip it. I like people – do not get me wrong. But like many people, I am often overwhelmed by big events and need to psych myself to even show up. If this sounds like you, invite a friend to join you. Find a way to volunteer or have a role.

And do not forget the invention from Alexander Graham Bell. In many cases, picking up the phone and having a conversation will cut through many layers of clutter and expedite your efforts.

With some inventive hybrid networking, 2009 can be a good year.

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