

**£2.50**

**10**

**top tips for  
effective  
networking**

# Introduction

Jackie Barrie founded Comms Plus in 2001. It's a writing and design business that specialises in making complex information appear simple. She grew it from nothing, survived the critical first two years and then doubled her profit in year 3. Meanwhile, she reduced her marketing budget to zero (yes, £0) as all her business comes through word-of-mouth marketing or 'networking'. She is happy to share the secrets of her success in this booklet.

We also recommend the 12 tips in *'It's not rocket science: make the room work for you'*, by Andy Lopata, MD of BRE Networking, available from 0845 100 4822 or [andy@brenet.co.uk](mailto:andy@brenet.co.uk).

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"Jackie was the organiser for a networking event I was the keynote speaker for. I found her attention to detail, enthusiasm and creativity a fantastic help and was a major factor to the success of the event"

**Peter Roper, Peter Thompson International**

# 1. *First things first*

Have a **good product or service** to offer. You have to be clear about what you are selling, and you have to be enthusiastic about it. If you can't wake up excited on a Monday morning you're doing the wrong job! Life's much too short to put yourself through that.

But if you are offering something that meets a need, and you can communicate it simply, finding customers to buy it should be a doddle!

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"Jackie is an inspirational and committed Networker. Her professionalism throughout all she tackles in her business activities, leaves nothing undone or to chance. Her down to earth but gentle practical manner, her warmth and enthusiasm when dealing with people always leaves its most positive effects on those around her."

**Andrew Widgery, Ecademy**

## 2. WIIFM

WIIFM stands for **What's In It For Me?**  
That's what everyone is thinking no matter what you say to them.

Talk about the benefits not the features.  
Take the customer's point of view. Don't say 'Here's what I'm offering, why not buy it'.  
Talk about how you can save people money, or time or hassle, about what problems you can solve. Sum it up in one sentence. I'm not talking about a mission statement. I'm talking about a simple sentence in Plain English.

### **Examples:**

'Your ad can be printed in full colour'  
becomes 'Choose our full colour option to grab 40% more attention'

'We design pretty logos' becomes 'We can increase your sales by creating a professional brand identity'

'We produce newsletters' becomes 'We help you build relationships with your customers'

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"Jackie really has a way with words and ideas."

**Pankaj Patel, Croydon Zone**

### *3. Don't sell!*

People buy from people, so just **be friendly and nice** and when people know what you do they will want to do business with you. We all know what it's like when someone tries to sell to us. We know they are after the money in our pocket and we don't want to give it to them!

Networking is so easy, just turn up on time, be professional, do what you say you will do, and smile! That's the type of person that everybody likes to work with.

### *4. Listen and learn*

Don't do all the talking. **Ask questions** instead. Everyone has something interesting about them, whether it's the job they do, or a hobby that they are passionate about. And people love to be asked for advice. So if you see someone that you admire, go and ask how they achieved their success. Or even ask someone where they got their lovely jacket, just to start a conversation.

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"I am delighted with all the hard work and creative thought that you have put into our newsletter. I am very grateful for what you have done and am looking forward to working with you on the next issue."

**Paul Castle, Crest Partnership**

## 5. *Make connections*

Like anything, the more you put in, the more you get out. It's said that every business person knows at least 250 others, while world champion networkers know hundreds more. All you need to do is connect relevant people to each other and sooner or later someone will return the favour for you.

I now know so many people I feel like Cilla Black on Blind Date! I listen to what people say and I know who they need to speak to and then put them together and leave them to it. I haven't yet had to buy a hat but you never know!



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"Jackie takes a form and redesigns it to meet all the users' needs. She considers those who have to fill it in as well as those who have to process it afterwards. She understands cost and print constraints, and even manages to match the form to the brand identity."

**Christine Lambert, Senior Manager Business Processing**

## 6. Preparation...

When you attend an event don't just count the time you are at the event and travel time, also include the time it takes to prepare what you are going to say, who you are looking to meet and what questions you might ask.

## ...and follow-up

And afterwards, follow up your new contacts with a message to say 'Nice to meet you' and perhaps referring to something you discussed. If you have offered to connect someone, make sure you act on it within 48 hours at the latest.

Traditional marketing takes more money than time. Word-of-mouth marketing (or networking) takes more time than money. Scrimping on either one just won't work. So when you note a networking event in your diary, be sure to include extra time before and after the actual meeting. Hey, no-one never said it would be quick!

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"Comms Plus designed my flyer and I've been busy ever since. It worked for me!"

**Andrew (Loveto) Williams, building and maintenance**

## 7. *Be a tart!*

**Accept every invitation**, within reason. There are lots of networking opportunities out there and we recommend you try them all, until you find which suits you best.

A successful networking event works because of the individuals that are there, not because of the organisation that arranges it. Keep shopping around until you find that group that works for you.



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"Writes like a dream."

**Vincent Toomer, former MD, Insul-Coustic, SA**

## 8. *Repetition* *Repetition* *Repetition*

Once you've found an event you like, you have to **keep going back**. If you thought there was a kernel, a nugget, the merest hint of something worthwhile that might turn into an opportunity, then you have to keep going back.

Let's face it, it's unlikely that you will meet someone on day 1 who says, "I don't know you but let me give you some business!" In my experience it can take 6 to 8 meetings before someone turns from a stranger into a customer. That's why weekly breakfast meetings work so well, it can be only 6 to 8 weeks before you get some business. But if you go to a monthly event, it takes 6 to 8 months. With bi-monthly events, it can take a couple of years.

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"It is a joy to see someone who can write without waffle. It's so rare."

**Katherine Trimble, Gaelkat Ltd (copywriter)**

## 9. ASK for what you want

Don't try to sell to the person standing in front of you, ask who they know. **Be specific.** If you save people money, then don't ask 'Who do you know that wants to save money'. The answer to that is 'everybody', it's too general. Instead ask 'Who do you know that's a single parent, or an OAP, or a student, or struggling for cash at the moment'. That might lead you to a specific person or piece of business.

Note: Don't underestimate anybody – the next person you talk to might be related to your ideal client, they might play golf together, or even live next door!

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"A very interesting and well-presented brochure with lots of variety."

**Mr BA Crowley, Berkeley Clean Ltd.**

## 10. *Be confident*

Don't shuffle around and be shy and modest about what you do. The more confident you appear, the more opportunities you will attract.

And here's the secret to appearing confident...

Just **pretend**.

There was some research about people's biggest fears. Death came third! The number one fear was walking into a room full of strangers and number two was speaking in public. But that's exactly what you have to do when you go out networking. We're all scared! So all you have to do is **pretend**. Because, honestly, nobody except you knows the difference.

**Contact Comms Plus for local networking opportunities, your marketing communications, and lots more creative ideas.**

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"Thanks for the site, it looks really lovely and is already hitting regular numbers."

**Barry Winsbury, Quantumhydro**

**Newsletters  
Copywriting  
Web design  
Proof-reading  
Events**

**Other tips booklets include:**

- Ssh! Discover the secrets of successful communication
- Checklist for events that go with a bang!
  - 8 guaranteed ice-breakers
- Climb that marketing mountain, with ease

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