



An old-fashioned handshake is worth a thousand hits

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I love my rotary phone! Those born in the 90's might not appreciate the reference. What I am really saying is that I love old-fashioned technology and no, I don't really have a rotary phone but I wish I held onto my old one. I'm not averse to trying new things. I have a Twitter account, a LinkedIn account, a Facebook account and my own website. But in this age of high technology, nothing can replace a good old-fashioned handshake. And that handshake is worth a thousand hits.

Networking is the art of casting your bait and seeing what it draws in. The problem is that when casting your net on the Internet, you have to do a lot of sorting before you can focus in on the contacts that are worthwhile. I happen to enjoy using all of the technology and websites I referred to above, but those alone are not a substitute for hand to hand contact! LinkedIn is great for vetting potential clients, employees and potential team mates. In order to make the most of your contacts you should ask yourself the following questions prior to accepting an invitation.

Why does this person wish to connect with me?

Will connecting to this person help me with my business?

Have I ever met this connection in person?

Then if you aren't sure why this person is asking to connect, by all means ask them where they met you, how they were referred to you, etc. You'd be surprised at how often you either don't get a reply, or you find out how they know you and you are happy to accept.

It's okay to click "no" when being asked to accept an invite. Sometimes having too many connections for the purpose of networking can have a negative impact. It's great to have contacts through user groups when communicating a message. Connections should be treated as the business friends who they are presenting themselves to be. For networking purposes, you need to be able to recall a person's name, their firm and their abilities without having to do too much searching.

Have you ever disconnected from a connection? I'm not recommending this but if you are not using your list on a regular basis, it is time for you to clean it up! Review your list of contacts and ask yourself the following questions:

When is the last time I communicated with this person?

Is their profile up to date?

Are they still in a position to help me professionally?

If these contacts are no longer beneficial to your professional life, you may want to consider disconnecting them.

Once you've cleaned up your list, it's time to get back to that hand to hand contact. Look for local events and invite some of your contacts to meet you in person! Instead of coffee or lunch, suggest attendance at an industry event that would benefit both of you! For example, if you are an architect and your contact is a real estate broker, look for the local COREnet chapter meeting and suggest

you attend together. Our real estate industry is full of associations including BOMA, IFMA, AIA, local chambers of commerce, and various other building contractor organizations.

One of my recent successes involved attendance at a local IFMA event. A former competitor of mine from the carpet industry invited me to attend this local event as his guest. At the evening festivities, I met the director of sales for a locally-based manufacturing company. He mentioned to me in passing that if I was ever interested in making a career change, I should contact him about his architectural product. I decided to join IFMA and continued to attend their events. As I continued to form a business relationship with this manufacturer, they suggested to me that I should form my own manufacturer's rep group. Fast forward a few months and I incorporated my firm and took on their brand as my first product line! I still attend these events on a regular basis and on occasion I've had the opportunity to invite my on-line connections to join me.

After gathering the cards of new people I've met at these events, I filter them and invite them to connect with me online. It's the same formula I mentioned earlier but in reverse. Now, instead of inviting the online contact to meet in person, you can connect with your personal contact online. You can search one another's profile to see what connections you have in common. If there is someone you are looking to meet, you now are able to ask someone that you've met in person for a referral. So while you are embracing the new technology, don't forget to extend your hand once in a while. You never know where you'll meet your next connection.

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