

NETWORKING BUILDS TRUST

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Lynda Kavanagh believes strongly in the first rule of operating a business: Build trust.

"No one will buy or refer you if they don't trust you or the people who work for you," says the owner of **WOW Communications and Training**, a marketing and consulting company in Lethbridge and Calgary.

One of the best ways to build that trust, **Kavanagh** suggests, is through networking, a process whereby people exchange information, contacts and experience.

"Trust is a big thing these days," **Kavanagh** says. "Consumers are savvy and they've been beaten up by poor customer service and promises that aren't kept."

Kavanagh warns businesses not to confuse networking with selling. Many business owners often feel they need to push information on others or try to make a sale whenever they're talking to others. That's not networking and the aggressive behaviour can send potential customers running.

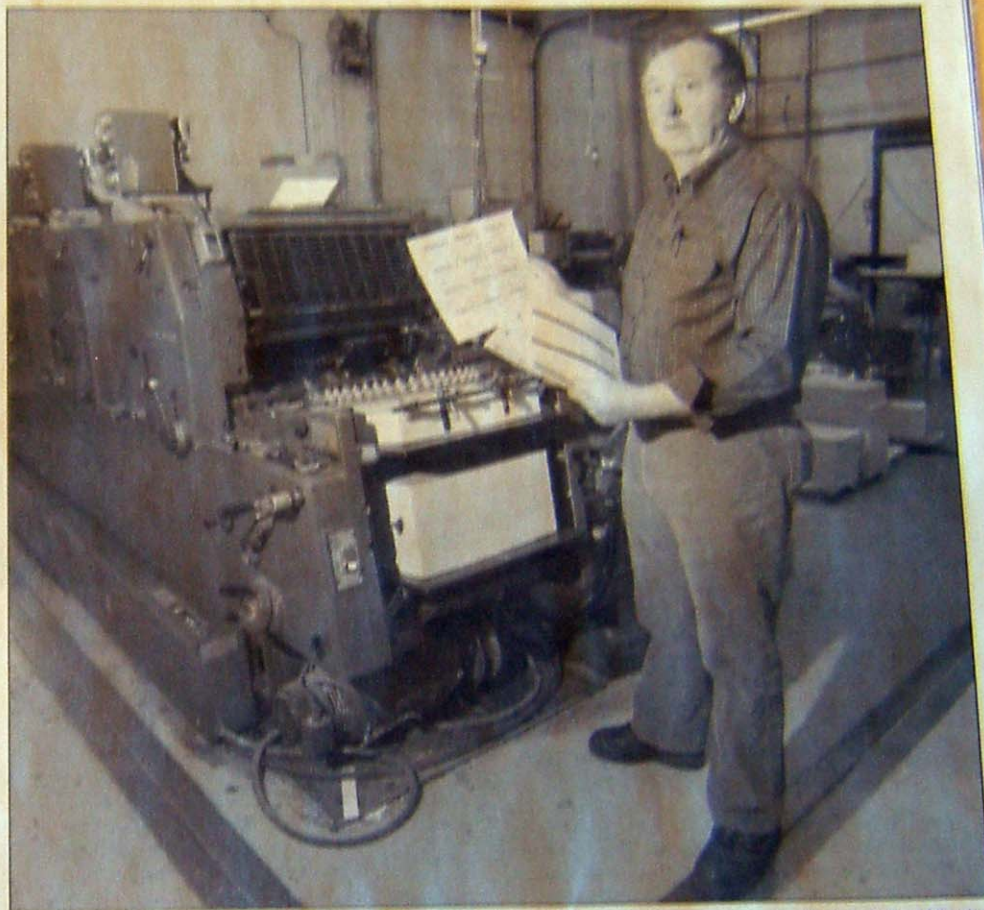
Networking helps people understand and hopefully remember exactly what services or products a company provides.

"If you tell someone in a manner that they can understand what it is that you do, and they feel comfortable in trusting you, they will refer you. I've had people call me saying my hairdresser told them what I did and that I could perhaps help them. First the hairdresser needed to know what I did, and then she had to feel comfortable in referring me to someone else. So in networking, the person you are talking to may not even be a potential customer, and that's okay, all you want to do is give them the appropriate information. We call networking 'passive' marketing."

Sales, on the other hand, are "targetted" marketing and should be avoided at networking functions.

Networking is a two-way street, requiring the sharing of information between two or more people. It's not a hit-and-run affair where only one person benefits. Yet if done properly, networking can be one of the best marketing tools for a small business.

"Networking is a very low-cost activity in marketing because it can happen anywhere." Standing in line to buy tickets to an event



Herald photo by David Rossiter

Dave Warwick from Warwick Printing prints off large sheets of business cards, a key resource when it comes to networking among clients and businesses.

or waiting for a table at a restaurant provide opportunities to talk to others. How you respond when someone asks what you do for a living could provide an opportunity to network and develop a relationship of trust.

Kavanagh says there are many opportunities to network every day, and people should be prepared to network by knowing beforehand how to respond when someone asks "what do you do?"

"It used to be that we had about 30 seconds to respond to the what-do-you-do question, before people got bored or tuned-out. But a report came out last year that stated people now only have an attention span of 10

seconds. That works out to be 25 words. Those 25 words are your networking statement. It should include your expertise, your target customer, and if possible the benefits to the target customer.

"Mine is," I'm a marketing consultant and trainer. I help take the frustration out of marketing for small business and start-up entrepreneurs."

Networking isn't hard to learn, **Kavanagh** has taught networking seminars and is working on an audio CD based on her workshops.

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