

How To Network

Without Scaring Your Client Away



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“Communicating without a strategy is like throwing darts blindfolded – just less likely to hurt your audience.”

Having worked for 20 years in the facilities industry, Michel now works with suppliers and facility managers to improve results. This includes helping suppliers develop compelling proposal responses and helping Facility Managers develop their RFPs and evaluate submissions, giving him a unique perspective from both sides. His new book *“Win More Business – Write Better Proposals”* is now available.

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If you're involved with a local association for facility or building managers, you're making one more step towards increasing business. If you've become involved in the association as a volunteer, board member or elected official, you've even gone beyond most of your competitors.

In fact, for most associations, vendor members are an important and integral part of the association. Their memberships, sponsorships and other support is what enables the association to put on good events that are of interest and value to the facility and property management members.

So the next question is how you maximize your value from being involved and attending networking events. The simple reality is that neither facility or property managers want to be 'sold' at association meetings and, if you cross that line, you are actually less likely to get more business.

Some potential clients will avoid attending events or cluster together to fend off suppliers. They may have had a bad experience or they may be in a position or with a company that attracts a lot of attention from suppliers. Some companies want something different when they attend networking events. I've seen senior level man-

agers inundated with suppliers who want face-time and to exchange cards simply because the manager has buying power.

You shouldn't look at membership and attendance as a quick path to sales. Membership and involvement in an association is a long-term investment that increases your company's visibility with clients in a positive, constructive way that a sales call simply can't do for you.

In many cases, the potential client won't even have a need for your services when you talk to them at an association event. They already have a contractor providing services, and the odds are their renewal or re-tender is a ways off. Trying to sell to them or even asking when their current contract is up, when you first

meet someone at an association meeting, is a sure way to lose their interest. And, if they are ready to buy, about to procure services or want to bring someone in right away, they are likely to let you know who if they know who you are – without the sales pitch.

Awareness, trust and respect is what is important. When they have a need, they will know that you are a potential supplier to call on. Using an in-your-face approach during networking meetings will not be

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well received, so you need to start with awareness, then build trust and respect. Introduce yourself and your company name, making it clear what your services are, but not selling them. Then ask about them and strike up a conversation to begin the process of fostering a relationship.

If you want to go to the next step and build the trust and respect, show interest in the customer, their company and their issues. Instead of asking for their card or

handing them one of yours, have some insightful information you can share with them. As long as it's relevant, and not just a sales tool, ask if they would like you to send some information to them. Of course, you need to actually have some insightful information to offer. It may be something you or your company have created, something you've seen from other sources, such as a magazine article or something from your own supplier or other

sources that is available for you to distribute, like information on how to select green products, information about pandemics, information about the client's industry, news items or other relevant information, even if it isn't directly related to your service or products. It must, however, be interesting and helpful to the facility or property manager.

Then they are more likely to share their card with you. Even so, if you are a regular attendee of the association events, try to hold off until the next time you meet the individual to offer something to them, but be ready with something insightful to talk

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to them about so you can develop interest for what you have to offer.

If you've chosen to become involved in the association, it's even easier for you to gain visibility. As a committee member, board member or elected official, your name and company will be more prominent and you will have a great reason to circulate and talk to the other members at events. Just remember to keep the sales pitch out of it.

By taking this approach, you will build your exposure to possible clients and build a reputation as a helpful, solutions oriented supplier who they want to interact with because they know they won't get a sales pitch. Then, they are more likely to remember you when they need the services or products you have to offer.

The advertisement for JohnnyVac is a large black and white graphic. At the top, the brand name "JohnnyVac" is written in a large, elegant, cursive script. Below the logo, the image is divided into four quadrants showing various vacuum products: a large upright vacuum, a smaller canister vacuum, a collection of various attachments and tools, and a close-up of a vacuum head with a hose. The word "COMMERCIAL" is printed in a smaller font below the main logo. At the bottom of the graphic, the website address "www.johnnyvac.com" is displayed in a bold, sans-serif font.