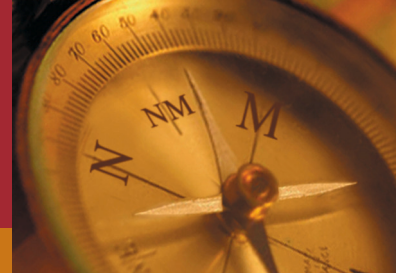


NM Marketing Communications

Point Toward Success.



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Building Business Relationships in a Fast-Paced, Technology-Based World

Business relationships are based on trust. As the world changes, that basic fact remains. In today's business climate, effectively building relationships requires developing trust and connection despite time constrictions and the proliferation of communications technologies.

Time is at a premium.

The days of the regular two-martini lunch are long-gone. Business moves faster as the years fly by, and most professionals have less time – and inclination – for traditional relationship-building activities. Today's lunch often consists of a rushed salad at Corner Bakery after several last-minute cancellations.

Chatty phone calls about the kids have been replaced with breathless cell phone exchanges on the way to the train or, more likely, quick emails. Networking and industry events have been replaced by websites and webinars. Much business travel has been replaced by teleconferences.

Given this situation, business relationships have less space in which to evolve. The worst thing to do is to force leisurely conversations when your client is busy and stressed. A quick question at the beginning or end of a phone call – "How are the kids?" – shows you're interested, while still allowing the other person to answer with a "Great, thanks!" if they don't have time for details. Similarly, a quick comment in an email, such as "Hope Billy is still enjoying that bike!" shows you're paying attention, but doesn't require a long answer.

Technology has radically impacted the ways we communicate.

A few short years ago, contacting a client usually meant calling their office and leaving a message with an assistant or on their voice mail. Today, it often means shuffling through a variety of contact options.

Email has become the communications vehicle of choice for many professionals, yet the art of writing emails has not received much focus.

Generally speaking, effective emails are similar to press releases or journalistic articles – clear and concise with the main points upfront, including the who, what, when, where and why, followed by the detail. Research shows that you can lose readers if you bury important facts within the body. Bullet points are also effective, as it can be harder to read copy on a computer screen. Basically, any way you can make your points clearer is a plus.

Although technology has impacted us and the world seems to be spinning faster all the time, the basic tenets of relationship-building remain the same.

Make a good impression.

Making a good impression used to involve things like strong handshakes and professional appearance. Those things still matter, but you also need to consider the impression you make in your ongoing business relationship. Today that includes things like creating professional, actionable, clear emails (and spell-checking them), working effectively with the clients' external websites, software systems and business processes, and being responsive to their needs and requests.



Listen.

With so little time to connect, it is more important than ever to listen carefully. Since you may not have the same amount of quality time together, you have to pay attention to the little bits of information the other person tells you about themselves, their life outside of business as well as within the company and industry, and their interests and passions.

Remembering details about another person and then responding later – for example, emailing an article that may interest them or leaving a quick voicemail when their college team wins a big game. That type of thoughtful gesture goes a long way to showing someone you care enough to listen, remember and respond.

Understand the other person's needs and preferences.

As you develop working relationships, you need to learn how others prefer to communicate. Do they make time for one-on-one meetings willingly, or are phone calls preferable to them? Are they phone traditionalists, or email junkies? Do they respond to voicemails with emails or vice versa? Adapting to their needs and preferences will make it as easy as possible for them to do business with you and not someone else.

Be responsive.

It's easier today than ever to follow up quickly by shooting off a quick thank-you email or response to an inquiry, attaching requested documents. We usually don't have to wait for the fax, much less the fedex or the mail. We can even email requested documents while we're still on the phone!

With the ability to respond so quickly, it stands to reason that people's expectations have risen. Even if it takes some time to find the information you need to respond, you can send a quick email to let people know you're working on it with an estimated time of delivery.

Deliver what you promise.

As always, the best way to build trust is to do what you say. Be true to your word. No technology changes or time crunches can dilute the important of delivering on your promises. ■