

Taking word-of-mouth marketing online

In his book *The World's Best Known Marketing Secret*. Ivan Misner, the founder of BNI, detailed six types of networks that people should consider getting involved in:

Casual-contact networks, strong-contact networks, professional associations, service clubs, social organisations and women's business organisations.

Well things have changed since the mid-90s and he's the first to admit that had he been writing the book today he'd have included online networks.

What follows paraphrases a piece Misner has written on the subject that I found on [Beneath the Cover](#)

The more things change the more they stay the same

Things may have changed since he wrote the book but Misner maintains that the fundamentals remain the same. Online or offline, you've got to develop relationships with trusted business associates.

And he suggests the following five ways to do just that:

1. Join at least one online networking community

He recommends [ecademy](#) as a good example – but there are many to choose from.

But like a membership at the local gym it won't do you much good unless you actively take part. Be active in posting topics and threads on your area of expertise and participating in the threads of others that match your area of interest. You'll gain visibility which can lead to credibility and ultimately, business.

2. Start a blog or write a column for a web site or e-newsletter.

It will get picked up by a self selecting group who will help create the buzz around what you do. Writing regularly on and around your chosen topic will go a long way to building your online networking presence.

3 Develop an email newsletter for your own company.

Create a database of clients, suppliers and friends and send them regular content that drives traffic to your site. Keep the scope of the content as broad as possible within your specialist field. Invite clients to contribute. Little and often is the watchword. But not too often. Optimum frequency will vary from business to business but in most instances more than twice a month could be irritating rather than invigorating.

4. Never forget that it's still about trust.

Focus on developing real personal relationships. It's only once you've established a foundation of trust that you will feel comfortable referring people and your network will feel comfortable in referring you.

It may take a little longer when you can't see the whites of their eyes but it holds as true for online networking as it does for face-to-face. Misner recommends a visit to www.networkingcommunity.com part of Coachville.com where they teach people about social capital and networking in an online community setting.

5 Last but not least, be aware of the cultural mores of online networking.

People tend to be much blunter online than off. They'll speak their mind in a way that would be socially unacceptable face-to-face.

To illustrate this Misner uses the example of asking a complete stranger for their business. The stranger may feel put on the spot and uncomfortable but is unlikely to respond in an aggressive manner. Online, protected by the browser window and potentially thousands of miles between you, the same stranger won't mince their words. So it's doubly important to build the relationship first before you ask for business.

Sound familiar? It should do. It's exactly the recipe Misner recommends for building your business through networking, offline.

Posted by [David Hughes](#) for [BNI Tower Hill](#) 3/8/2007

Dr. Ivan Misner is a New York Times bestselling author. He is the Founder and Chairman of BNI, the world's largest business networking organisation. His latest book, [Master of Sales](#) can be bought from Amazon. Dr Misner is also the Senior Partner for the Referral Institute, an international referral training company. He can be reached at misner@bni.com