

Turning Visibility Into Sales

By C. Richard Weylman, CSP, CPAE

Making the transition from networking activities to sales requires that you become well known on an individual basis. Gaining high individual visibility will ultimately permit you to deliver more products and services to the people in your niche market because you will have stepped out from the crowd and they can identify you as someone who is clearly different.

It is critical to understand, however, that one of the most effective ways to achieve high individual visibility and to create more sales is to meet people face-to-face. Current research indicates that 77 percent of affluent Americans are interested in purchasing financial services and products from individuals that they meet face-to-face. This means that you have to join and participate in your niche market organizations not only to have name recognition, but to have face recognition as well.

Networking helps shape the prospect's perspective about you. Sales are created, however, when you are working and interacting side-by-side with the very people around whom you want to build your business. Make the network work for you by working the network. To convert the visibility you gain from networking into sales, you must recognize the fundamental prospecting principle in networking – your personal interaction will drive curiosity and, ultimately, the sales process.

There is an insurance agency that wanted to target CPAs as a niche market and several of the agents were interested in building a relationship with these accountants. They wanted to become the personal insurance agents of these CPAs. To facilitate the process, the agency put on special events and informational seminars designed for their target market of CPAs. The agency was very successful in this phase of networking. Eventually, these seminars became accredited as continuing education programs for CPAs. The program was so valuable that CPAs from a wide geographic area began attending. The CPAs' evaluations of the programs were always very high. They felt the information was timely and topical and also very applicable to their practices.

Yet, after five of these programs, the agents had not seen much of an increase in sales and wondered why. The agency and the agents had built great visibility and credibility with these CPAs and were positioned as extremely valuable resources. What was the missing link? The individual agents had not stepped out to establish personal interaction with the CPAs one-on-one. The agents were not using the credibility they built for their agency (and themselves) effectively. They needed to represent and demonstrate these strengths on a personal basis.

In this case, it meant becoming pro-active by reaching out after the courses and contacting the individual CPAs to begin building personal relationships. This one-on-one contact is the missing link that many agents struggle with and that prevents them from turning networking events into sales.

How can you take your high visibility resource positioning and establish credibility and convert that into sales? There are two very effective ways to do this:

1. When you're attending a networking function such as an association meeting, golf outing, or other activity where you are interacting with prospects, target three or four individuals at that function that you want to meet with individually after the function is over. As an example, if you attend association meetings, sit at a different table each month and meet the two people on your left and the two people on your right. Engage them in dialogue to build rapport, and thus open the door.

First, ask the people you're targeting to meet with you individually. You need to approach them instead of waiting for them to come to you. For example, invite the people you meet at the function to get together with you one-on-one for breakfast or lunch or simply for coffee so that you can "hear more about what they do" and brief them on some of the things you've been able to do for individuals like them. The personal outreach that you make to an individual (not to sell them something, but to hear more about what they do) is essential if you want to create sales from your marketing and prospecting efforts.

2. Offer something of value to drive a desire to meet with you. As an example, take a camera to the association or organizational meetings and take a picture of yourself with the guest speaker and a couple of prospects. You can then call the prospects on the telephone and offer to bring by their picture. Great opportunity for you to get in the door. Also, you may offer to bring a copy of the notes that you took from the program, particularly if it was a speaker bringing ideas applicable and of interest to them. Or, you can simply offer to bring by your loaner copy of a book, audiotape, or magazine that you discussed during lunch.

The most important point in this process is to realize that when you do meet with these people for the first time, don't immediately jump into a sales mode. When you're transitioning from networking and prospecting activity to sales activity, you must continue to build rapport and to increase their level of trust. Otherwise, they'll think you're just there to sell them as opposed to building a long term, mutually profitable relationship. Be sure that you focus on learning more about their business and starting a relationship with them. This is the type of pro-active, one-on-one approach it takes to convert your visibility into sales. Once you've gotten the door open and you're in their place of business or in their home, take the opportunity to build rapport and then move forward into your research and needs analysis phase as is appropriate.

One-on-one contact is the most forgotten link between visibility and sales. As Dr. David Clark, a professional fund-raiser in Dallas, Texas, says, "Friend-raising precedes fund-raising." The same principle applies when you are converting your marketing and prospecting activities into sales activities.

In today's over-marketed society, it's vitally important that you take the time and have the patience to demonstrate a personal interest as opposed to simply a financial interest in perspective clients.

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