

Business Cards Crucial Tool for Effective Networking

One of the key elements of small-business success is getting the word out that you are in business. This means developing and maintaining an effective network.

“Letting people know you are in business is the first step once you open your doors or even as you begin to think about having a business,” says (Insert name) of (Insert title and county). “If people do not know you are open, they are not going to be a customer.

“Plus, you want professional colleagues and those supporting small-business development to know you are out there,” (insert last name) adds. “You need the help they can offer, along with the contacts they can make on your behalf. These individuals are willing to help.”

Today more and more methods are available to small-business owners to spread the message about their business. Online tools and social media have been great additions, and companies have had some great success using them.

“Of all the tools, though, that are available to small-business owners to help build their network, probably the most important remains the business card,” says Glenn Muske, the North Dakota State University Extension Service’s rural and agribusiness enterprise development specialist. “The long-standing, simple business card should be the first tool you need if you are starting a business.”

The business card often is ignored today or considered less important in developing a network. Social media tools are considered the “must-have” item. However, the business card provides your contact information in a compact, easily used and easily saved format. It works with prospects, customers and professional colleagues. It can be handed to a person, dropped in an envelope, put into the shopping bag and tacked to a bulletin board.

In a recent survey, more than 95 percent of business owners indicated that the business card was still important to their business. Business cards provide a first impression, remind others what your business is about, reinforce your logo and tag line, and have a long life.

“Unlike brochures that get tossed and email that gets deleted, business cards are usually put away for the future,” Muske says. “And to top it off, they are inexpensive.”

Here are some ways you can get the most value out of a business card:

- It must look professional.
- It must contain the right information: your name, company name and address; contact information, including your website; and other social media addresses.
- A picture or photo can help your card get attention.
- Include the tag line or benefit statement of your product or service.
- Leave some white space.

“Most people typically leave the back side of the card blank,” says Muske. “Why leave half of your message space empty? This space can be used in many ways: a map, a shopping list of the

products you have, a discount coupon or even a joke - anything that might help you connect with the customer.”

(Insert last name) says, “And just don’t leave one card; leave two. Ask the recipient to share one or bring one back for a free gift. Think creatively of how you can use your cards to bring consumers in the door and make them customers on their way out.”

Business cards always have been and will continue to be one of the most important tool in your marketing toolbox. Make sure your card gets attention. And never stop handing them out. Even if you already have given someone a card, hand him or her another. You want to keep your name and what you do in front of customers and potential customers. Your competition isn’t stopping, so neither can you.

For more information on marketing your business, visit NDSU’s small-business website at www.ag.ndsu.edu/smallbusiness. Sign up for the monthly newsletter. You also can contact your local Extension Service office at [insert phone number and email address] or visit www.eXtension.org/entrepreneurship.

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For more information, contact glenn.muske@ndsu.edu or call (701) 328-9718. You also can visit our website, www.ag.ndsu.edu/smallbusiness.