

Out of the Box

You can't be stingy with your visibility.

By Jeremy Walsh, Area Director – BNI Rhode Island

I remember my first box of business cards. I spent countless hours poring over the design and layout, considering each spacing of the font. I wondered whether I would lose credibility with a potential client because my address was left justified instead of centre or right justified. I boggled whether to include my mobile phone number. Of course, having just started my very own business, I unwisely decided not to use a graphic designer to work with me and quell my fears over the whole process.

Nevertheless, it was a big deal--it was *my* business card. The first impression of what people would think of me. The basis on which my entire business would be judged. I visualised myself carrying them in a brass business card holder and handing one over when a prospect requested my information.

Finally, my wife said to me, "Enough already. Just print the things!" So I ceased all editing and had them printed. At the time it seemed a big expense and when I finally got them, I carefully handed them out one at a time—making sure not to waste them. It took me a year or maybe even more to go through that first box of business cards.

Now, I probably go through about 1,000 business cards every six months. I give them out by the handful. I don't give people just one; I give them two or three and ask them to pass another on. If allowed, I leave stacks of them at my favorite businesses. I hand them out at networking events. I give them to relatives. The printer loves me.

Business Cards: A Metaphor for Networking

I look back and think how short-sighted I was. Business cards don't do any good if they sit in the box. They need to be in the hands of people who might need you.

But, you didn't really think this article was just about business cards, did you?

Think about the metaphor: Like business cards, you don't do any good if you are stuck inside your box. You are your brand name, you are your company, you are your image and you need to share it with the world. This is about networking and getting out there and meeting new people. If you really want to engage word-of-mouth networking, you can't be stingy with your visibility.

You need to get out of *your* box: your home, cubicle, office, car, or wherever you isolate yourself – and get to a networking event. And not just one. Get out to as many as possible. If you find that networking isn't working for you, then it is because you aren't working your network. Did you ever notice that the people who get a lot of business from networking are those who are always networking? Coincidence? I think not.

So go for it. Get out there and network. When I see you there, I would be happy to exchange a few business cards with you.

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