



Women in Corporate Aviation

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White Knights Connect

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Business, executive, or private aviation is a very discrete business when it concerns the end-users, the passengers, the clients or owners. Who are these clients? Where to find potential new clients? How will they become aware of you, your business or services?

Connections are one of the most valuable assets and may be called external social capital. Connections are bad if you don't have any. Business networking may be the single most cost-effective method of marketing, just as word-of-mouth may be the single most effective manner of promotion. Business networking is a marketing method by which business opportunities are created through networks of like-minded business people. Networking is all about relationships and creating connections by being genuine and authentic, building trust and seeing how to help one another. Networking certainly works for me to develop business for "my" airports.

Who knows you?

It's not what you know but who you know that makes the difference. And it isn't just who you know. It's actually who you know, who knows you, and what you do.

"More business decisions occur over lunch and dinner than at any other time, yet no MBA courses are given on the subject." - Peter Drucker.

Farm, don't hunt

Networking is not about hunting contacts down or keeping track of how many people to one another. Connectors thrive because they actively seek to move the value of their networks from one contact to another. They know and trust that this interaction will benefit them, too. Their networking is a matter of finding common elements among the people they've known for years and the new people they're meeting. Connectors are known, respected, and appreciated. They are known as a powerful resource for others. Once one is known as a strong resource, people remember to turn to them for suggestions, ideas, names of other people, etc. Connectors with the most robust networks end up hearing about the exceptional opportunities, locating the best resources, and generally reap many benefits from their contacts.

White Knights and Black Knights

Network connectors are White Knights who do what is best for the information and structure, to better themselves and the systems they maintain. They never try to accumulate power, they circulate what they have and encourage others to do the same. They continually put the other person's needs ahead of their own. Black Knights are networkers who try to control and reign control over their structures thinking it secures their interests. Their power structure is maintained by carefully screening who gets in and who does not, including some and excluding others. Sounds like an "Old Boys Network", doesn't it? A network of social and business connections as an informal, exclusive system of mutual assistance and friendship through which people belonging to a particular group exchange favors and connections.

Does it pay to have a booth at a trade show?

Many companies spend lots of money on having an expensive prestigious looking booth at an aviation trade show. If one has a booth, it needs to be staffed; you can't have an empty booth. The bigger the booth, the more staff is tied up. A booth may be an invitation to be visited but it often is reactive doldrums area. Corporate people like to mill about in their own company groupings. That is what is often seen on the large exhibits: lots of people knowing each other already. They talk to strangers as little as possible; they are stranger averse. And that, over time, can hurt them. Their networks don't grow and opportunities may be missed big time.

People in the entrepreneurial realm are miles ahead of the corporate ones when it comes to making and sustaining business connections. Entrepreneurs love to talk to people about their businesses. Networking is typically their prime channel for new clients. Networking is proactive. It is about get-ting off the booth, going out to talk, and "work the floor". It involves more personal commitment than just waving the flag of the company on a piece of rented territory in an exhibition hall. It is about finding and building new "one-to-one" beneficial relationships. In many cases, it is better not to have a booth at a trade show, certainly not a large exhibit. The fact is that an exhibit costs. But does it pay off?

The author Cdr. Bud Slabbaert is an expert in Development of Business Aviation at airports. He is initiator and Conference Chairman of the BA -MEETUP.