



NONTRADITIONAL NETWORKING

BY RACHEL ANTMAN

What is nontraditional networking? Definitions vary. To some industry experts, it encompasses anything beyond participation in industry events, meetings, and trade shows. Examples might include involvement in local community groups, socializing through shared hobbies, or cultivating relationships across industries. Other experts have a narrower definition: They view nontraditional networking as networking in the virtual realm, a trend influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. Whatever definition you prefer and whichever activities you undertake, don't neglect best practices that position you for success.

PURSUE YOUR PASSIONS

Broader definitions of nontraditional networking emphasize fun—yes, fun. Practitioners of this method engage in

pastimes they enjoy. As long as these pastimes involve others, they can result in valuable business leads. This is certainly true for Wills Elliman, SIOR, senior managing director at Newmark in Wilmington, Del. An avid tennis player, he puts the “net” in networking: One person he played with hired him to broker a 23,000-square-foot deal. Elliman also plays paddle tennis, where again a fellow player brought an opportunity his way by requesting a proposal for the sale of an office building with an expected strike price of more than \$75 million.

Elliman's interest in music and attendance at concerts have yielded further opportunities to make new friends, some of whom have become clients. For others seeking fringe business benefits from fun, he advises: “Whatever you like to do, do it and just

keep your ears open for how to make business out of it.”

PUT YOURSELF IN THE RIGHT PLACES

Nontraditional networking is “all about putting yourself in situations where you can be surrounded by the caliber of prospect that could be a helpful future connection,” according to Tripp Guin, SIOR, principal at TRIPP Commercial LLC in Charlotte, N.C. He offers the examples of buying a first-class plane ticket instead of an economy-class ticket, or sending your kids to a private school. On a first-class flight from Dallas to Charlotte, he got to know Tony, the person sitting next to him. As it happened, Tony was moving to take over a company in Charlotte and was going to need some new space. He asked Guin to assist.

RECOGNIZE THAT OPPORTUNITIES ARE EVERYWHERE

Fortunately, Guin loves making new friends. He notes: "I'm always looking to put myself in groups with people who are like-minded." These groups might focus on politics, church, philanthropy, or even his children's sports. His oldest daughter played volleyball for four years with the same team, and Guin became friendly with other volleyball parents. He stayed in touch with one father who was recently promoted to president of a bank's Charlotte region, and Guin helped him find office space. The friend, meanwhile, helped Guin with the purchase of an office condo, a PPP application, and opportunities for a 1031 exchange. As Guin points out: "The relationship is going both ways."

NETWORK ACROSS COMPLEMENTARY INDUSTRIES

Todd Holley, SIOR, senior vice president at Voit Real Estate Services in La Jolla, Calif., has taken a methodical approach in "setting up his sphere of people." He formed a networking group of highly respected salespeople from complementary industries—those that provide products or services for companies seeking to relocate or expand. By limiting membership to one company per industry, the group avoided internal competition.

Holley reports that he's received many direct referrals from group members, resulting in closings of significant leasing and sales transactions. He likens the

members of this "strong trusting group" to "little elves working for me," and tries to return the favor: "It's been very beneficial for all of us."

MASTER THE VIRTUAL

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced most networking to take place online. Several SIORs believe this form of networking is no fleeting blip. In their opinion, it offers certain benefits that give it staying power beyond the pandemic, and is therefore worth mastering.

Adam Kaduce, SIOR, senior vice president of R&R Realty Group in Des Moines, Iowa, has become a fan of virtual panels, happy hours, and meetings. He particularly appreciates the roundtables that SIOR has been hosting. "I've connected with people all over the country and gotten their perspectives and seen what they're seeing," he says, noting that trends in the bigger markets eventually make their way to Iowa.

Other groups in which Kaduce is involved have adopted virtual networking with alacrity. His Rotary Club, which normally meets for breakfast once a week, has transitioned to Zoom, which has led to presentations from speakers based in other countries. "All you need is a computer and video and you can link up with anybody in the world," he notes. "It's an incredible opportunity."

Mark Duclos, SIOR, president of SIOR Global and president of Sentry Commercial in Hartford, Conn., agrees. He, too, has been speaking to people all over the world via videoconferencing and managing to meet many SIOR members

despite lockdowns. Furthermore, he's seeing record attendance levels at online events that were formerly in-person.

MIND YOUR VIRTUAL MANNERS

To ensure that your online networking is effective, keep a few etiquette tips in mind. Kaduce urges videoconference participants to be cognizant of their screen backgrounds. He also emphasizes the importance of good lighting to help people read your visual cues and of strong connections that prevent static or lags. Duclos reminds people that "while you're on that screen, you are working. You're in a meeting and you're building your brand and you're building your career." Bathrobes do not cut it.

If you've been networking via phone rather than video, there are other pitfalls to avoid. Business and career coach Deena Baikowitz warns against multitasking during these calls. "We can hear the clicking of your keyboard and the delay when you answer '... uh uh uh uh ...'" Her basic guidelines: "Pay attention, listen, learn, and share."

Baikowitz advocates both networking by phone and networking by video when in-person gatherings are impossible. Uncomfortable with video technology? Now is the time to develop your expertise. "If you want to be relevant in the future, you better get used to it," advises Duclos. "I don't think this is a temporary state."

EMBRACE THE NONTRADITIONAL

Whether online or offline, nontraditional networking is a key contributor to

career success. Don't limit yourself to the standard trade shows and industry events. Recognize what's "right in front of you," says Guin. "Just pay attention to the things you spend time doing with family and friends. Explore ways to give back in those areas and surround yourself with people with similar interests. That's how strong relationships are built and how future opportunities arise." ▽

MEET THE AUTHOR

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