

Filtering Your Contacts

To create a contact that will be of value to you in the future, you need to be diligent in your follow-up now.

By Ed Wesemann

The recent opening day bid-up of LinkedIn's public offering was another reminder of how attuned professionals are to creating networks. But networks are like gardens and, in order to survive, never mind grow, they require some measure of care.

Unfortunately, most of us spend so much time trying to collect business cards and finding ways of linking with valuable contacts that we fail to do anything to maintain our network.

This became clear to me when I learned that Facebook, as a part of its normal algorithm, filters out status updates from any "Friends" with whom you haven't interacted recently.

Now, given the volume of emails and Facebook posts I routinely get from people I barely know, I'm not sure that such an algorithm is a bad thing. But the point is, we tend to do the same thing ourselves to our networks without even realizing it.

Suppose, for example, that you meet someone at a social event. You talk for a few minutes and exchange business cards. That person goes into your network (however you organize it) as a possibly valuable contact. But what is the realistic shelf life of such a contact? Could you really call that person up in six months and, with a straight face, say "Remember me? We met at that United Way party last May?"

Most of us are pretty good at doing some sort of follow up immediately after we make a contact but then ... nothing. True networkers tell us that it takes three "unfulfilled *quid pro quos*" (things you do for someone that

does not require they do anything in return) to establish a contact. It can be as little as a voice mail message to pass along some form of industry news or a clipping from a magazine that you think will be of interest.

The point is, to create a contact that will be of value to you in the future, you need to be diligent in your follow up now.

By the way, the importance of following up is not just for contacts. Lawyers are great pessimists and tend to filter themselves out of all sorts of opportunities. This is never truer than with marketing presentations.

We make a proposal or presentation to a potential client and that's it. We might make one follow-up phone call or email but if we don't hear anything back, we filter them off of our contact list as not being interested.

People are busy and considering your proposal may not be at the top of their priority list. We're all afraid of being like the pushy insurance salesman, but a good rule is never filter out a prospective client until they actually say no.

The bottom line is that filters are good when we are in control of their use.

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