

GLOBAL NETWORKING: It's not what you know, it's who knows, what you know

BY ROBYN HENDERSON



Picture yourself in a boardroom with 8 women in Australia looking at a double television screen. On one screen is a picture of the Sydney boardroom, on the other screen a picture of a boardroom in Toronto Canada, where another 10 women are set to do business internationally. Wow—the joys of technology.

“Would you like to be part of a virtual trade mission between Canada and Australia?” Never one to miss an opportunity, I agreed and then asked the question—what is a virtual trade mission? Boy was I in for a steep learning curve.

Background:

A group of very innovative women based in Canada had set up a virtual trade mission with the support of sponsors including the Royal Bank of Canada, Austrade, Westpac Banking Corporation, Industry Canada, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada. The former national manager of Westpac Women in Business, Amanda Ellis had formed a core group of women in Sydney late last year to launch O.W.I.T.: Overseas Women into Trade, initially to facilitate trade with women in Canada and Australia. I was fortunate to be invited to participate in this core group. Our first task was to register online with our electronic profile: www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/trade/missions/oltm/auscan (If you are also looking to export to Canada, you are welcome to also register online). Once registered, we then became part of a Yahoo list serve, which was a great way of getting everyone communicating with each other on line, prior to the VTM. The next step was the virtual trade mission. The Australian Technology Park in Sydney has the latest state of the art video conferencing equipment and this was our venue for the inaugural Virtual Trade Mission.

Major Networking Opportunity:

After the formal introductions and welcomes, we took turns describing our businesses and what we were wanting help with from our overseas counterparts. Without exception, each request from Canada or Australia was met with a definite, “you need to speak with XYZ” or “I have a friend who will know someone in that field”, or “the website xyz will have answers for you.” Without exception every one of these woman was connected with a potential strategic alliance or directed to where the ally could be sourced. And we had businesses represented as diverse as heart valve producers, compost bin manufacturers through to filmmakers.

Now, in all my years of networking, this was definitely one of the most powerful demonstrations of “it’s not what you know, it’s who knows, what you know.”

And it got me thinking how powerful it would be on a daily basis

if we actually asked for help with the things we needed, rather than trying to solve things ourselves. In less than 90 minutes 19 people literally had doors open for them in other countries, purely by being succinct and direct with their requests for help. The final step was, of course, taking action and following up with those leads.

I was asked to give a brief outline of the points that I thought were absolutely critical to ensure the maximisation of any potential strategic alliances. You may like to consider the following key points with any national or international alliances you are considering:

1. Be specific: the more information you give, the easier you make it for people to help you
2. Be prepared to start small and prove your worth to a potential client, prospect or ally.
3. Never assume anything. There may be differences in language/customs. Confusion may occur if you do not clarify everything. Assume nothing.
4. Ask yourself: how much are you prepared to lose or invest in terms of time and money to make this VTM work? Without commitment you won’t get your return on investment (ROI)
5. Once you form a connection, set specific time lines on how, when, who, where, why and how much will be done by a specific set time.
6. Allow for exit clauses. If you have made a connection with a potential client/ally, plan a task that needs to be completed by a set (realistic) time frame. If step one does not happen by that time (without a reasonable explanation), then you may consider suggesting a possible exit clauses for both parties. When you value your worth others will too.
7. Always work win-win. If it’s not win-win it will not work long term.
8. Ask yourself: Why am I doing this? Will this opportunity take me one step closer to my goals or further away. Be clear on your intention, then make the commitment to make it work for you.
9. Aim for quality alliances not quantity. Establish alliances one at a time. Trying to manage dozens will result in confusion for you and your potential allies.
10. Imagine building a bridge from one country to the other. With every alliance we make that bridge becomes stronger and stronger for everyone.

Measuring Success

At the conclusion of our 90-minute link up, the virtual trade mission was hailed as a HUGE success. The measure of success would ultimately be determined by who followed up in a timely fashion and maximised these golden opportunities.

Start Your Own Mastermind Group

Don’t wait to be asked to join a mastermind group—why not start your own. Handpick a group of like minded people, set up a meeting, be clear and specific on your outcomes and wait for the magic to happen. It won’t take long for you to see the power of networking.

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