



# HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF THE CHRISTMAS NETWORKING PERIOD

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## A SURVIVAL GUIDE FOR PROFESSIONALS

End of year networking functions should be a great way to boost your business development. But this time of year can also start to get a bit draining. After all, it sometimes feels that we're at a social event every night of the week. And, all that partying, and time away from work and from the family, can leave us feeling, flat, tired and even a little bored. It can also leave you wondering what the point of it all is, especially if you're not meeting the right people or having the right conversations. So, to help you avoid Christmas burn out and make the most of the next month or so, I've created this guide to going about Christmas networking the right way

### 1. BE SELECTIVE

As I said at the start, chances are you'll be invited to a lot of functions between now and the New Year and, let's be frank, not all of them will be created equal. There's the firm Christmas party, the section Christmas party, the client Christmas parties, the supplier Christmas parties, the industry Christmas parties and then there's Christmas parties for everything and everyone in between.

So don't accept every invitation that lands on your desk. Be selective about which functions you go to and why. Choose, say, the top four based on the people you'll meet and the fun you'll have and make these your priority. Give the others a polite decline. Just make sure you have a good excuse and that you use it nicely, so that you don't get anyone's nose out of joint.

### 2. PAIR UP

OK, so now that you've got that out of the way, let's assume that the functions that are on your list all offer some kind of networking benefit. The next thing you need to do is to work out how you're going to arrive. That might sound strange, but I think it's important. I say this, because most professionals I know will arrive en masse - everyone who's been invited walking through the door at the same time. But that's self-defeating. If you go in a group of 10 of your own, you'll usually end up talking only to your own.

A better approach is to find just one or two other people you know who'll be attending and arrive in a much smaller group. That way you won't face the awkwardness of arriving without knowing anyone, but you also won't be surrounded by so many people that you need not socialise with anyone else.

### 3. BE PREPARED

Most people turn up at functions thinking they're going to be fed properly. Big mistake.

The chance is next to zero that those canapes find their way to you often enough to assemble a meal. It's also not a good look to be gorging yourself on arancini balls in front of people you're trying to impress. (I've learned this one from personal experience.) That's why now I always go to a stand-up

function having already eaten a light meal. I also like to arrive early. That's when most of the best conversations happen - at least the ones people are going to remember.

And finally, I make sure that my name tag is on my right hand side and at collar bone height, so that whenever I shake someone's hand, they see it.

#### **4. HAVE AN EXIT PLAN**

One of the things people usually find most awkward about a function is extricating themselves from a conversation they don't necessarily want to be part of. But there are many tactics you can use to make sure you don't get stuck talking to someone the entire function.

One good one is to make sure your glass is never more than half-full. That way you always have an excuse to go back to the bar.

Another is to introduce the person to someone else you know and to then slip away. Whatever you do, just make sure you're not always using the excuse of needing the bathroom and then sitting on the toilet for 10 minutes at a time - people will start to get suspicious.

#### **5. HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY**

You don't have to prepare a script but, if you're meeting people you hope to impress, you should always have something interesting to say about your practice. Maybe that's a project you recently completed or commissioned, or a particularly tricky piece of work your team was involved in.

Whatever it is, just make sure that it's relevant to the conversation. You don't want to look forced. At the same time, you don't want to be the 'brain bully' of the group, pulling people up on the small mistakes in their stories.

You also want to know your market. Talking about the latest changes to tax legislation may make you cool at a barristers' bash but you'll look like a nerd talking about the same thing in front of corporate clients.

#### **6. PUT OTHERS FIRST**

OK, so I've just asked you to think about something you've done well, but the people who everyone likes most are those who shine the spotlight on others.

So talk about the people who've joined your team. If you're speaking to a client, tell them what it is you like about them. Be the connector who introduces people you know would have common interests, or who might need each other. That's the kind of stuff that will win you real brownie points in the long run.

#### **7. FOLLOW UP**

If you meet someone you get along with, don't leave things at the function. Follow up with a LinkedIn request too. Otherwise, have a draft email you can send out to any connections you've made, one that says: "Hi Agnes, It was great chatting with you last night. I thought you might like to see the article I was referring to. Here's the link. Look forward to catching up soon." Or: "Hello Anne, It was lovely meeting you at yesterday's lunch. As promised here's my website and email info. Hope to run into you again soon." You get the idea.

## AND FINALLY...

Lastly, it goes without saying that social functions really should be enjoyable. That's meant to be the whole point of them. I know not everyone is an extrovert who feels energised by pressing the flesh. However, you still should get some modicum of enjoyment from meeting people.

But, if you really don't enjoy it at all, don't force yourself through the ringer. Find another way to connect. That could be by blogging, meeting people one-on-one or using social media. Whatever it is, just make sure you're connecting with the right people and that your expertise - and your personality - shines through.

## WANT MORE?

If you'd like to know more about networking [get in touch](#).



**Sue-Ella is the Principal of [Prodonovich Advisory](#), a business dedicated to helping professional services practices sharpen their business development practices, attract and retain clients and become more profitable.**

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