

Networking for people who don't like networking! ■

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Six months ago the only way you'd get me into a networking event would be kicking and screaming, I had visions of suited men standing in huddles and me on my own in the corner. But then my good friend and coach from the Alternative Board convinced me that it should be an essential part of my marketing plan. In January I committed to getting out of my comfort zone and start to attend networking events. I got off to a bit of a false start avoiding a couple of them which I'd promised myself I would attend. My first breakthrough was a Forward Ladies Day which was both enjoyable and informative and I found that other people felt the same way as I did.

I have attended a couple of BNI meetings, which were enjoyable but required a bit more commitment than I can give at the moment.

In March Chris invited me to a 4N breakfast event in Huddersfield. I really enjoyed this and met Paula who I arranged to meet at another meeting in Leeds the following week, from there I was invited to the Toby Carvery on Harrogate Road in Chapel Allerton. I decided to become a member and take advantage of the membership offer. What I enjoy about 4N is the friendly relaxed atmosphere and the mix of social and business. There's an opportunity to deliver a 40 second presentation and to arrange 3 one to ones so you're guaranteed to get the chance of meeting likeminded business people and talk about your business.

I have since buddied up with one of my clients and we often attend networking events together. We've been to Simply Networking and we had a really good evening at a Suits and Vynl evening on Friday where people mixed their love of music, brought along their vinyl and met like minded people.

Here are my top tips for people who don't enjoy networking

- Go with a friend / colleague but make sure that you don't stick to them like glue – you won't meet anyone new
- If you are approaching a group of people watch their body language – if they are facing inwards they probably won't welcome the interruption but if they are facing to the side they are likely to be welcoming
- It's not just about who is in the room, everyone you meeting has a network and most people are happy to refer you to other people
- Make sure that you can tell people just what you can do in 60 seconds – that probably needs a bit of practice but you'll get there
- Every networking event is different – find the right one
- Give networking a go – it really is a great way to broaden your business network