MARKETING SELLING

Build Your Network, Increase Your Opportunities

Growing your business network is like a plant developing roots — reaching out in different directions to get what it needs to grow. You and your customers can take advantage of networking situations to connect to people, partners, trends and more. Networking is an important skill in any line of work, but for a B2B company, and for the agriculture industry in particular, these relationships are critical for gaining trust and developing opportunities to show customers that you're an important partner who can help them grow their business.

ag industry. Plus, it's a great way to share stories of farm life, farming challenges and how our industry meets the needs of our communities.

Try these strategies for making the most of your networking opportunities:

Target your networking

Looking for expertise in a specific area? Try to connect with someone with experience. If you're looking to expand your social media presence to gain customers, reach out to someone who's doing it successfully. And be sure to reciprocate – be that solution-minded contact for someone else and share your expertise. Is a farmer having trouble with a specific problem on their acres? Offer them ideas or connect them with someone who has overcome the challenge.

Attend a networking event

Networking is primarily a way to build relationships – with potential customers and suppliers, other business and community leaders, those who share your interests or goals. But networking can do more – for you and for your business.

Networking plays a role in building a positive reputation for you and your company, helping establish you as a go-to person for advice and industry insights and making it more likely that contacts will recommend you to others. Networking is an opportunity to share knowledge, whether that's offering a farmer best practices for pest control or seeking another seed company's ideas for streamlined inventory management. Networking is a valuable tool for gathering different perspectives on issues facing the Participating in a networking event can help you make new connections, engage with business leaders and industry experts, hear about emerging trends and solutions, while learning from others who do what you do and face some of the same challenges. This could be a local small business association meeting, an ag tradeshow or a larger trade industry group's conference (*see sidebar*). At agricultural events, you'll be surrounded by like-minded people who understand the importance of building relationships. Come to these events prepared to network and be networked. Have a few talking points prepared, such as how you've solved a problem that others might be facing, a tip for generating business leads, something that makes the products you offer unique or a trend you're seeing in the industry. You can use these points as conversation starters with people you meet.

Try digital networking

Even in a personal industry like farming, not all networking takes place face to face. Digital and social media platforms let you keep in touch with professionals in your area, reconnect with old friends and colleagues or start new conversations with people you meet on the job or at one of those networking events. LinkedIn is one of the most powerful platforms for networking with people in our industry and at other B2B companies. See our article about LinkedIn marketing in the October *Groundwork*. Facebook – your page or someone else's – and its comments sections lets you initiate conversations with those you follow or who follow you. These platforms, as well as Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), Snapchat and others, have private message options that offer another way of reaching out.

Networking gives you and your customers opportunities to meet new people, hear other's viewpoints and learn about industry trends and opportunities. In a business that's built on relationships, it's a crucial skill to develop. Why not try our networking tips at one of these upcoming industry events?

ATSA Field Crop Seed Convention

December 5-8, 2023 Orlando, Florida betterseed.org

IPSA 35th Annual Conference

January 15-18, 2024 Indianapolis, Indiana ipseed.org

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