

## How to Network in Three Minutes or Less

It happens every day.

You're going to the dentist/supermarket/PTA meeting and you run into someone you haven't seen in years. What happens next? Recognition, check-ins on one another's families and then, the inevitable question: "So, where are you working now?"

And just like that, you're on stage and have to demonstrate that (a) you **know** what you do for a living; (b) you can **describe** it to an outsider; and most importantly (c) you can **sell** it to this person who may be a prospective client.

There are lots of resources that can help you craft the perfect elevator speech which, despite the term, doesn't need to take place in an elevator, nor does it have to be a memorized speech.

Instead, it's important to have in your repertoire a few well-crafted sentences and phrases which accurately describe you and your company so that you can share them in a natural, conversational way. By keeping any networking interaction friendly and low-pressure, you'll actually connect with the prospect as a person rather than as a [gulp] "salesperson."

For instance, when I'm in this situation and someone says, "So, Adam, what are you up to now?" I typically respond with something like, "I'm co-owner of a marketing and web development firm in Providence."

That's short and sweet, and often it satisfies a top-level inquiry. If the person responds with, "Oh, really? We were just talking about updating our company's website, but it's so much work," I can start asking him for more information about their experiences — and listening for pain points [which may be helpful if they become a client!]. More often than not, such a conversation ends about three minutes later with a plan to call later and book a meeting.

That's it. My goal with this encounter is not to describe what it takes to build a website or to convince them that our agency can build their website with less stress. Instead, this simple conversation lays the groundwork for building a relationship. Remember: no one will buy a truckload of widgets at their daughter's ballet recital, but they may agree to your calling them later in the week to book a meeting.

The lesson in all this? Be prepared to talk about yourself briefly... and to engage others fully. People want to know enough about your business so they can decide if you may be able to help them, so figure out what they need to know and tell them. Then stop talking and listen.

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It seems hard to believe, but this article wraps up our series for 2008! Check back in the new year for more tips and suggestions on ways to continue building your business. And have a great holiday season!



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