

ESSENTIAL TOOLS NEEDED TO GET RESULTS AND THRIVE FROM YOUR NETWORKING

MODULE ONE

Module One – The Essential Networking Strategy

Contents

How to Use This E-Course.....	2
Support	2
What Are You Gaining from This E-Course?	2
Taking Action	3
What Happens at the End of the E-Course?.....	3
Client Confidentiality.....	4
The Essential Networking Strategy	5
Have Specific Outcomes.....	7
So, What Do You Want?.....	8
See, Hear and Feel	8
Smart Goals	9
Groups and Contacts	10
Applying Your Outcomes to Your Networking Meetings	13
Building Your Team.....	13

Helping You to Create Excellence in Your VA Business!

Thank you for joining me on this e-course. This means that you are more than ready to start making a difference with your networking and you want to start getting results and thrive!!

How to Use This E-Course

1. You will have access to 10 modules.
2. The modules you receive will cover the tools you need to get a return on your investment, not only from this e-course but from your networking membership and fees.
3. You will receive some templates and example scripts to support you so that you can implement them into your networking strategy.
4. There will be a series of “Actions” to complete so that you ensure you are taking action alongside your learning, as otherwise this will be a complete waste of your investment in terms of both time and money.

Support

I am committed to supporting you on this programme and remember that you can message me on Facebook Messenger or via email on Amanda@vact.co.uk with any questions or queries about your learning, as you work your way through the Modules.

What Are You Gaining from This E-Course?

There are many different challenges that VAs have experienced and this e-course will help you focus on the essential tools to succeed in networking. These include:

- Creating your strategy;
- Confidence in networking;
- Building your team of supporters;
- Referral networking;
- Building strategic alliances;
- Creating your message;
- Presenting with confidence;
- Building long term relationships and more!

These are key areas that I will be covering within each module which will enable you to start getting better results from your networking.

Taking Action

I appreciate that people do invest time and money into their networking but don't always get the outcomes that they desire and therefore start to question whether networking is a good investment. So, by taking action, and only by taking action, you will start noticing the positive changes in your networking outcomes. I state *only by taking action* because reading this e-course and not taking action would be a complete waste of time and money.

What Happens at the End of the E-Course?

Once you have completed your e-course, you may feel that you would like to have some coaching, training and mentoring support to help you with the detail of your networking strategy and action, or perhaps to support you in building your confidence or even fine-tuning what you want to say. Coaching sessions can take place via telephone, Zoom or Skype at the fee of £150 for a 60-minute session.

Business coaching is the catalyst of change and the support mechanism to see those changes through. If you keep doing what you have always done, you will keep getting what you have always gotten. If you want something different to happen, then you must do something different.

Using the coaching on the course you will experience the following:

- Build supreme confidence, motivation and a positive self-esteem so that the lack of it is no longer holding you back or causing you stress;
- Create a positive attitude and delete all the unhelpful “what ifs”;
- Get totally clear on what it is you want to achieve and experience the associated achievement;
- Become brave enough to ask for more than you ever thought possible;
- Understand how to signpost your journey and know which direction to take;
- Benefit from thinking big while having the ability to focus on small, achievable, baby steps;
- Experience greater effectiveness and attract new opportunities;
- Have a sounding board for all your ideas and be able to discuss them confidentially and without judgment;
- Be believed in and know that you DO have what it takes to make it happen.

When you have a Coach or Mentor, you not only have someone to talk to about your problems and challenges, and about the goals and objectives you want to achieve, but also someone who holds you accountable for your success and to create the mindset for success - someone who is not going to interrupt you, make judgments about you, criticise what you're saying or offer 'helpful' opinions based on their own experience. If you have lost direction or feel stuck in a rut with work, your Coach or Mentor will help you focus on what's important by setting you highly-effective exercises designed to help you identify what you would like to have and do.

Client Confidentiality

We abide by client confidentiality. Please note that all information on our clients and all information provided within delegate assignments are kept in the strictest of confidence and not divulged to any third party. We request that you do not share this course with others.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish you every success in your networking. Remember that what I am about to share with you has been based on the success of my own business. It will only be guaranteed to work if you use this as part of your 90-day plan, are consistent with your actions and planning, and remain totally committed every day to do something towards your networking strategy. If you miss one component out then it will fail you. Do it right and you will thrive!!

Be You and Be Awesome!

Amanda

The Essential Networking Strategy

Ivan Misner who is considered one of the world's master networkers says 'Networking is more than shaking hands and passing out business cards. It's about building your 'social capital'.'

Would you do business with someone you don't know? NO! So in turn how can you expect people to do business with you if they don't know you?

Building relationships with people is important because, not only do you see whether your first judgements were correct, you grow to know, like, trust and respect that person and want to support them as well as the fact that you want that person to get to know you – so they can support you also. It all goes hand-in-hand doesn't it?

Some people will go to a networking meeting and get very disappointed if someone hasn't taken an interest in their business or if they haven't made a sale. The point is you should not be going to a networking meeting to sell.

You attend a networking meeting to create awareness of your business so that referrals can be generated, you are supporting your business community and building your dream team, you are building relationships so that people get to know, like and trust you. The potential is endless!

Networking online should not replace networking in person, although there have been many VAs who have taken on clients through just 'meeting' online via social media. However, there still has been the process of building the trust.

Do you have a networking strategy?

Through conversations with VAs I have noticed that there are three main challenges that come up because they have not really understood how to create a networking strategy. In fairness, we are very good at building a business plan or business strategy, but for many people networking doesn't always seem to fall into that plan or strategy. The first challenge to overcome is about creating a networking strategy.

First of all, let me explain to you what networking is. The emphasis is on cultivating and nurturing relationships with other professionals who might help you build your business and where you might be able to help their business. It's very much about building relationships.

Brad Burton, founder of the 4N Networking Organisation, in his first book¹ made the poignant point: would you do business with someone you don't know? NO! So, in turn how can you expect people to do business with you if they don't know you?

When you want to find a decorator or an electrician or a builder, you tend to first go to people you know, like and trust for their recommendations. Of course, we use

¹ *Get Off Your Arse.*

resources like Yell and we do Google searches online, but I know I prefer to do business with someone who has been recommended. Most people I know prefer to give business to people that they know, like and trust, and when you have been given a recommendation, that person is at an advantage. They are benefiting from your relationship with the person who has made the recommendation, the person that you already know, trust and like. **Please put the emphasis on cultivating and nurturing relationships and make it a major part of your networking strategy.**

So, let's consider the first challenge - how do you create a networking strategy?

You have to have a clear plan that would lead to a return on your investment.

What happens with a lot of people, not only VAs but other business owners too, is they will go to a networking meeting and get very upset or de-motivated if someone hasn't taken an interest in their business or if they haven't made a sale. They're disappointed. The point is you are not going to a networking meeting with a readymade contract just in case someone wants to become a client!

I have had many a conversation when I have asked VAs: "When you go to your networking meeting, what is your intention?" and they respond by saying: "Well, I want to come away from that meeting with a new client".

NO!

It just doesn't happen that quickly!!! You must be thoroughly prepared to invest time and energy into your networking. This means that you stick the dates in your diary and do not let anything get in the way, not even your client work.

If you have been networking for a length of time and not seen anything from it, then I would like to ask you this question: "Have you been consistent?". If not, then you have negatively affected your opportunity to build relationships so that people can get to know you, like you and trust you. When you do that, then people are not always so forthcoming to pass business to you because they haven't got to know you, *really* know you. They've not had the chance to understand your business and who you work with, or even what support you are looking from them.

Here's another question: Have you been clear with what you tell people? I mean in the way that they really understand what you do and why people work with a VA, even why they work with you!

As part of your networking strategy you must be committed, you must be consistent, you must be getting to know the people in your group, you must follow-up regularly, you must support people, you must make the time and you must invest in you.

However, the first starting point is that you must be very clear what you want!

Have Specific Outcomes

The first point you have to be really clear about is: What do you want to achieve?

Actually, we need to get back to the original basics: What do you want to get out of your VA business?

The first BIG mistake many VAs make is that they launch their business and start going crazy trying to find ways of getting clients. They ask other VAs how they got their clients, they spend money on advertising, they sometimes become desperate for money, they lower their fees hoping to get clients... oh my goodness, this is just exhausting even thinking about it!

And what's missing? A long-term vision and a business strategy. It's a very simple step, but when you have one, you have a clear path to work your way through towards achievement. This will then make your networking so much easier and much more effective when it comes to gaining a return on your investment.

You have to have an overall business strategy. If you don't have a business strategy then it's like the saying goes: "You fail to plan, you're planning to fail."

As part of your wider business strategy you have a marketing strategy, and your networking strategy forms part of your marketing. This is absolutely essential if you are going to get anywhere in business. If you speak to any successful business owner, I would be really surprised if they turned round and said they didn't have a strategy.

It's vitally important as part of your business strategy that you have a one-year plan. That one-year plan then gets broken down into 90 day segments. 90 days is really easy to manage and you can work quite fiercely on it by creating an action plan for each day. By the end of those 90 days, your actions should have something that is cash generating.

It's nice going to networking meetings and it's nice meeting people for coffee but if it's not leading anywhere then it is going to be a waste of your time. You have to be very strategic about your networking.

As part of that 90-day plan, think about the people you want to meet: they might be people with whom you could create a strategic partnership, they could be people who work with your niche market, they might be people in your area who run an organisation, they might be people who you would love to have as a prospective client.

So, What Do You Want?

Making money is not a full enough answer – why do you want to make money? How much specifically do you want or need to be earning?

Keep drilling down to test the core of what is driving you and then ask “why?” and “what else?” This will lead to the core answer – the light bulb switches on!

Then you can ask - is your vision of where you want your business to go completely clear? The world changes daily, so your vision from even a year ago might have changed dramatically – are you clear about that vision today?

Is your vision relevant to what is happening in the market? That means clients' current demands and competitor activity.

To be successful you need to support your passion with all the tried and tested disciplines of a business.

My own vision is to inspire, support, challenge and motivate hundreds of PAs EAs and admin assistants to set up and run their own VA business and fulfil their optimum performance and reach their potential. From there I want to help them become authentic and, most importantly, be awesome.

See, Hear and Feel

I am not NLP trained and there are plenty of trainers who are, but this exercise can help.

What will you see, hear and feel etc. when you have achieved your vision – talk about your vision as if it is now. Make it really compelling. (Stated in the positive!) Success has to be something you want as much as your need to breathe. By describing your vision in the present tense and using all of your senses and using your imagination (we all have one i.e. imagine now your front door and what colour it is), you will be tricking your subconscious mind into believing that it has already happened. Your subconscious mind is a powerful tool and cannot distinguish what is real and what is imagined. So imagine the impact of stepping into your future.

Sometimes it helps to think about what you do NOT want which helps you to become clearer about what you do want. Think about what success means to you and how you will recognise when you have achieved it. Remember, success has different meanings to different people.

It is important that you have a specific date by which you want to achieve your vision and goals as this gives you a sense of direction, focus and you are more likely to achieve them.

Action:

What is today's date? Imagine we meet up for a coffee exactly one year from today. I haven't seen you for a year. Write a list of the achievements you would want to tell me you have done in that intervening year.

Smart Goals

"What you accomplish in one day may seem small, but when your actions are related to a plan, every moment of your day becomes extremely productive." Neil Ereskin

Planning and action is the key to your success. Otherwise, how do you know where you are going in life or business? Use the model below to start helping you focus on what you want and apply this to each networking meeting you attend.

S Specific: If you want to be happier, be specific - what will make you happier exactly? What are your objectives and what could be the barriers that may prevent you from achieving them?

M Measurable: What is your current situation that you are measuring your goal against? What will have to happen for you to be able to recognise when you have reached it?

A Action: What do you need to do to achieve the goal? Think about some of the first initial steps.

R Realistic: A goal should challenge you but if it is virtually impossible then there is no hope, which leads to disheartenment. What resources do you have available to you now?

T Time Based: Set a realistic timescale, with short-term goals with stated dates by which that goal is to be accomplished – within your control. Perhaps set a three-year goal and work backwards until you get to daily tasks which can be checked upon frequently. Do not just put a rough date i.e. August 2020, you must have an actual project deadline i.e. 26th August 2020 – this will give you a sense of urgency and it will give a sense of achievement and a sense of how to get to the end result.

Action:

Start noting down your responses to the following questions to help you get clear on your strategy for three years from now:

1. What income level do I want to attain?
2. How many people on my team will I have?
3. Where in the world will I work?
4. What type of clients will I have?
5. When people talk about me, what will they be saying?
6. What will be different about the way I work?
7. What will be the positive impact?
8. How will I feel?

Groups and Contacts

As part of your networking strategy, become clear about the type of contacts you want to start generating.

Some people will say it's really important that you do have a niche market, but if you don't have one, don't let it stop you from networking, but do understand why it is useful. If you are not established in a niche market, ensure you have desired outcomes. This could be, specifically, to meet people in your niche market or it could be to create connections with other business people who also work with your niche market.

This will in turn determine where you network. Do start to investigate where your niche market network. There could be industry related organisations which hold events such as exhibitions or conferences. There could be meet-ups around the country. You will also find that your niche will be members of networking groups too. Source them and then attend as a visitor to get a feel for them.

If you have found an organisation which caters for the niche market you are working with, then perhaps offer to help them with the arrangement of events in exchange for some publicity or even just your company name on the organiser's list.

Think about others who also support or work alongside your ideal client or niche. These could be web designers, social media experts, coaches etc. Start to investigate which groups you will find these service providers at. By networking in

the same groups you will have a better opportunity of making connections with them and possibly, in turn, being introduced to your prospective client base.

Perhaps part of your plan is to be able to create a strategic alliance with somebody because you know that is going to have an impact on the exposure of your business and raise your profile. When you are creating a strategic partnership with somebody, perhaps offering their products or their services to your audience, you need to ensure that this offering will have a positive impact (solve a need) for your clients.

Now the emphasis here is very much on the face-to-face networking and, in my humble opinion, online networking cannot replace face-to-face networking, but they complement each other. In fact, one cannot work effectively without the other and that is very much the emphasis for the VA industry today.

When you meet people online you also need to meet them face-to-face, but this can be via technology such as Skype, Zoom even FaceTime. Meeting face-to-face cements a relationship. You can pick up on someone's energy. You can feel whether you trust them or not, which doesn't always come across online in print. Sometimes you can sense that by phone and I do understand that being a VA it is all about being virtual, but people need a visual image too. They like to be able to feel your energy. They want to see your expressions and your body language. You can do a lot of acting online and by phone which you can't really do when you are face-to-face. I am sure you have had the experience when you meet somebody and you just have that connection with them. You feel that you have known them for years.

It's really important, as part of your networking strategy, that your face-to-face networking merges and connects with your online networking as well.

Look at the groups you want to join and don't join the first one you go to. Get a feel for the different groups in your area. There are women only networking groups which I think are fantastic for some people but not all. They can also be a great place to start networking because women do network in a very different, more nurturing way than men. But you shouldn't just focus on women only groups, you should be networking with men as well - they are business owners too!

I know many people say "men in suits are very intimidating". Well it's only if you allow them to be. Yes, some people may have a bigger ego than others and yes, they will be wearing suits, but if they turned up in jeans and scruffy t-shirts they wouldn't create a very good impression, would they? There are lots of men out there who are very supportive, very lovely to talk to and, you never know, they could be your prospective clients.

There are many different groups: 4Networking, Athena Networking Group, WIBN, Ladies That Latte, Ladies at Eleven, the 12.30 Club, BNI and, of course, the Chamber of Commerce - the list is actually endless.

When you are considering which group to join, be careful not to make assumptions about the group's membership. You may want to work with high level marketing

executives but none of them seem to be a member of your local group, but in all honesty you never know who is in the group and who knows who. It could be that someone in your small local group membership is married to a top executive within a corporate company. It could be that their next door neighbour knows somebody who knows somebody. It's all about those connections.

It is often said that every one of us is only six steps away from being connected to someone else through the connections of a friend of a friend. This is known as the "six degrees of separation". It is therefore important that you make "follow up" as part of your networking strategy. When you have been to a networking meeting you should be connecting on LinkedIn too. Then you will see who that person is connected to. So you might see one person who knows just the right person you want to be connected with and then you can ask for that introduction. Do remember that being in a position to ask for that level of help comes over time when they have gotten to know you first.

This is an important part of your strategy because this way you are getting direct to the people you want to be working with.

Networking with your clients should also be part of your networking strategy. This can be done online or face-to-face. If your clients are part of an industry they will hopefully be part of an industry organisation. If you are doing a great job, which I am sure you will be, they can refer you to other people. If you met your existing clients through a local networking group or you know that they are a member of a particular group close by, then ask them if you can go along with them as a visitor.

Pre-event preparation is about, first of all, identifying where you are going to network. Be very strategic about it. I appreciate paying £250 or £550 for a networking membership may seem a lot, so assess how many hours of fee earning work will you need to work to pay that money back. Crucially, by getting out there, you become part of a local networking community and that means if you lost a client, for whatever reason, you will have support.

A common mistake is to only attend networking meetings when you are not busy. Everyone who attends a networking meeting is busy but they are making the effort to keep their business in the forefront of people's minds and are there to support the rest of the group. It's frowned upon if you only turn up when you need something.

Once you have decided which groups you are going to join then you are building diversity, so you are looking at niche industry related events, conferences and groups that you can join. Then start to look for the connections you want to make.

To help you create action that will lead to cash generation, think about the type of people that would be ideal to connect with, who will then eventually connect you to your niche market.

Look for those connectors, look for people who also work with your niche market and see where there could be a connection either now or in the future.

Action:

1. Start thinking about the type of contacts you want to have connections to. Think about why you wish to have those connections and what's in it for them?
2. Start sourcing where your niche market gathers together. It might be that you only find something online for now, such as a LinkedIn group or on a forum. Join in if you can.
3. Source niche industry events that you can attend, approach the organisers and see if you can offer some support in exchange for a listing on their site.
4. Investigate the groups you want to trial in your local area.
5. Contact the organiser of the group and find out who goes there, which industries are represented and most importantly ask if it is one person per industry. If so, and there is another VA, ask to be added to the waiting list.
6. Once you decide on where you are going, stick it in the diary and plan your journey there.
7. Plan what you want to achieve while there.

Applying Your Outcomes to Your Networking Meetings

I would say give yourself at least three months to be able to generate relationships and maybe one of your outcomes could be to get referrals. This comes from generating and building those relationships. Making the effort to get to know other people and letting them get to know you.

Building Your Team

Are you going to a meeting because you are looking for associates? Maybe even associate VAs? Never be concerned that you are going to a networking meeting and there are other VAs there. They are not your competition. Well, they are in a sense, but the VA industry is very supportive, it is all about collaboration and support. So actually if you find you are going to a networking meeting and there are other VAs

there, fantastic! You know that all of you will have something different and you are going to have unique services and possibly your own unique niche market.

But it's lovely to know that you have got people locally with whom you can meet up, 'brain storm' together, share challenges together and maybe even support each other by way of being associates.

Action:

I would like you to use the questions below and apply them to your networking strategy, thinking about what you want to achieve overall from networking, plus what you want to achieve from each meeting you attend.

1. Are you clear about what you want?
 - a. Why do you network and what do you want to get out of it?
 - b. What exactly are you looking for?
 - c. Is it information, prospective clients or customers, referrals, help of some kind, all of the above?
 - d. Is it the same "thing" every time or does it vary?
2. Know what you want to achieve from a group:
 - a. Why are you attending this group?
 - b. Do they meet your needs?
 - c. What do you want to come away with?
 - d. Is there someone specific you want to meet?
 - e. Set yourself some goals for this event.

Action:

If you stated that you want to meet new people, then state clearly who these people are and where you are most likely meet them? What type of people are they, what value will it bring in meeting them?

This level of detail helps you focus your time and energy to identify the kinds of people who either know about such opportunities or can help you find them. It also helps you to determine where you might meet these people and what exactly you might talk about when you do meet them.

Do you see how your networking activities are directly affected by how clear you are about what you want?

By being clear about what you want and the outcomes you are seeking, which are based on the business strategy you have created, it then makes it easy for people within your networking circles to help you.

You cannot afford to say that you do not have time, or you are too busy with your client work, because otherwise you will stay pretty much where you are now.

Action:

Do you have a Business Plan? Ensure your networking activities are part of the Marketing section of your Business Plan. If you don't have a Business Plan, then please message me and I will send you a template.

What will you achieve in 90 days from today? Be exact with your intention? How does your networking support this?

Well done, this is the first of 10 modules... lots to think about!