

Vinyl Fence *Tip*

Practical and Proven Ways to Sell More Vinyl Fences

From your friends at National Vinyl Products

How networking leads to new business



Did you know you can have a great website, a stunning logo and all the right social media posts and still be missing out on one of the best ways to get new customers for your fencing business?

It's good old-fashioned networking...word-of-mouth. Networking is an important and reliable way to gain new leads. Let's look at what networking is, what it isn't and how you can use networking to build your fencing business.

First, what it is: networking is creating a group of people and keeping it active through regular communication. It is all about relationship-building.

Some people hear the term "networking" and think it involves being phony or always being ready to make a sales pitch. But that is not the case.

Networking is all about learning about people and creating relationships. It is more than just shaking hands and exchanging business cards. It is a plan to get to know people in your community, those who might do business with you or who might know people who will refer business.

Successful networking is not haphazard; it involves a structured plan for reaching out to others with the goal of helping each other succeed. Here are four key ways you can build your fencing business through networking.

1. Reach out to your community.

Think about it. Any property owner is a potential fencing customer. When you become active in your community, not only will you be of service, but you will get your company's name in front of people who buy fencing for homes, schools, parks and businesses in your area. Here are a few ideas:

- Volunteer with organizations that help build homes for low-income residents such as Habitat for Humanity.
- Get involved with your local schools either by serving on a committee or by sponsoring sports or academic teams.
- Volunteer with groups that clean up parks and other community properties.
- Become more active in your place of worship, perhaps taking on a leadership role in a community outreach event.
- Serve the youth of your area by helping with organizations such as Boys and Girls Clubs, Boy Scouts of America, 4H and the YMCA.
- Become a volunteer tutor at your local library.

2. Join professional organizations.

Another way to impact your community positively is join civic organizations. You will meet other local business owners and be able to share customer leads as you provide leadership and complete tasks for the community. Here are some possibilities:

- Attend county or city planning meetings so you know about new construction and developments.
- Join the Chamber of Commerce.
- Get involved with Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions or Business and Professional Women's Foundation groups in your town.



3. Teach workshops and classes.

Another way to network is by sharing your knowledge and skills in the fencing business with others. You could serve as a guest speaker at a Chamber of Commerce event, for example, or present a workshop for a local homeowners group.

Another option is to consider teaching a class through your local community college or your local university extension service. Perhaps you could put together a one-day workshop for homeowners that includes fencing and landscaping tips and invite other colleagues to present information as well.

4. Become an industry leader.

Fencing companies and construction companies can work hand in hand to reach new customers. Did you know there are more than 7,800 professional

associations in the U.S? Most of these groups are national (some international), but many have local and state chapters that meet regularly.

Membership in an industry association helps you stay current on trends and legislation within your industry, but, more importantly, it puts you in contact with other industry leaders. Many national organizations such as The American Fence Association <http://www.american-fenceassociation.com/> and the North American Fence Contractors Association <http://4nafca.com/> have regional and state events that offer great opportunities for networking.

The most important thing you need to know...

Now that you know some places to network, let's look at how to network effectively. Probably the most important quality of a successful networker is generosity. Of course, you are joining groups and volunteering because it will help your business. But once you become immersed in a volunteer project, forget about that end goal. Just serve people.

In his book *Power Relationships*, Andrew Sobel writes about an email he received from a business school classmate he had not heard from him in about 30 years. The email was a request that Sobel invest in a new venture, but it failed because it did not offer Sobel anything in return.

"He did not maintain a relationship with me, and he didn't evoke my curiosity," Sobel writes. "Before you ask for something, make sure you've invested in that person."

Relationships drive success, according to Sobel. When you develop strong new relationships through successful networking, you'll find that your reputation grows. "You'll be seen by clients as a trusted partner rather than an expense to be managed," he writes. "And you'll find the people around you eager to help you succeed."

In order for networking to work, it must be a two-way street. In other words, don't reach out to people with the idea of what you want to receive foremost in your mind. Reach out to help them with what they need. Share information and leads you have. Spend the time necessary to get their project off the ground. When you show this generosity of spirit, people will remember it. Then, when the right time comes, they will want to help you.

Your assignment: get out, meet people and give.



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