

“Match.com” for Homes
Chris Widen uses tech tool to connect buyers and homes.



ALSO

- Let Buyers Move in Before Close?
- Relationships That Boost Your Business

FLORIDA Realtor

SEPTEMBER 2017

THE BUSINESS
MAGAZINE
OF FLORIDA
REAL ESTATE

floridarealtors.org/magazine



CRUNCH
THE NUMBERS
CRUSH
THE COMPETITION

Embrace Accountability
TO DRIVE MORE SALES

AS IS UNDERSTAND
Contracts YOUR
DISCLOSURE
DUTIES

THE POWER OF YOU

BUILDING MIGHTY RELATIONSHIPS

Networking with peers, prospective customers and affiliated industry professionals

BY LISA A. BEACH

When Lawrence Darby, a sales associate with HomeXpress Realty in Brandon, learned that his contact owned a landscaping business with 40 employees, he had a light-bulb moment. Many of these fresh-out-of-college employees were renters, so Darby offered to give a presentation on homeownership versus renting. Taking a lender with him to prequalify attendees, Darby built an immediate connection with the employees and is now helping five of them buy their first homes.

Darby's story offers a great lesson in networking: To succeed, you need to develop relationships so people want to do business with you.



“Build rapport first and ask lots of questions,” Darby recommends. “You’re not there to make a sale.” If you network effectively, the business will follow, he says.

Here are Darby's top networking tips:

1. KNOW YOUR ROLE. If you're in a networking group, get a game plan. Determine what kind of group it is: social or business? Next, figure out what you want from the group. “If I'm going to an event for other [real estate professionals], I'm not there to get business. I'm there to build relationships,” points out Darby.

2. GET ENGAGED. Attending any business function involves more than just handing

out your business card. When you talk to people, ask about their family, job, hobbies and where they live. Focus on who they are, not who you are.

3. THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX. Don't look exclusively to networking groups or business meetings to broaden your professional circle. Get to know people you meet every day, like the cashier at the grocery store. For example, “I keep a notebook in my pocket to take notes,” Darby shares. “Then, I'll send a personalized email mentioning their dog we talked about.” Or he'll ask about a daughter or son the next time he sees the cashier.

4. FOLLOW UP STRATEGICALLY. Rather than bombard new contacts with a dozen listings,

“The world is your network. Everyone is your contact group. When you walk out that door, you're going to a networking meeting. With that in mind, wear something that identifies you as a Realtor®, such as your name badge or a T-shirt with your company logo.”

—REALTOR LAWRENCE DARBY,
HOMEXPRESS REALTY, BRANDON

send a personalized email featuring one specific listing based on what they told you they want. When he takes this approach, Darby says, “I can almost guarantee I'll get a response.”

Lisa Beach is a Central Florida-based freelance writer.

BEYOND THE BUSINESS CARD

Rather than collecting business cards at a networking event, ask for the potential contact's email address. Then, offer to send some information that's relevant to the conversation you just had with the person. “They feel safe because I'm not asking for their phone number,” explains Lawrence Darby, a sales associate with HomeXpress Realty in Brandon. “I'll bring 10 business cards to an event, but I'll leave with 30 email addresses.”

DIY Networking

For four years, Lilli Schipper, PA, a sales associate with Island and Resort Realty in Fort Lauderdale, participated in a Business Network International (BNI) group. It worked well early in her career, but after a few years, she was ready to move on. She took networking into her own hands and found success with two key approaches.

Small Groups. Seeking a more intimate, flexible networking environment, Schipper started a twice-monthly breakfast meeting at a local bakery. With no fees and minimal commitment, this informal gathering brings together about a dozen professionals from different industries, such as mortgage, title, gift baskets and contractors. "This format allows us to get to know one another better in a more intimate setting," she says. "It's friendly, loosely structured and no pressure."

Social. The opportunities to network on social media such as Facebook and Instagram provide a personal way to connect with customers. "Real estate is more than just a transaction," Schipper points out. She adds personalized comments when customers post a family photo or a back-to-school picture of their kids in front of the house they bought through her. "I use social media to build relationships," she says. "I share helpful information, such as painting tips and promote local events." This allows Schipper to network without being pushy. Using social media in this way positions her to become the go-to source for local information.

WHERE TO NETWORK

Networking opportunities abound, including locally, nationally and online. Many organizations host in-person events, regular meetings and volunteer opportunities, while others exclusively offer virtual networking. Try a little of both to see what works best for you.

Here are a few ideas to get started:



LOCAL/REGIONAL/STATE

- Chambers of Commerce
- Convention and Visitors Bureaus
- Florida Realtors® (florida.realtors.org): Including the Annual Convention & Trade Expo, workshops, continuing education, monthly board meetings, educational seminars and the Young Professionals Network (YPN), which is for all ages
- Local events: City council meetings, nonprofit fundraisers, professional workshops, volunteer opportunities, community festivals

- Meetup.com: Search online for local, in-person meeting groups by ZIP code and area of interest
- Service organizations (local chapters): Rotary, Kiwanis, Optimist Club

NATIONAL

- Business Network International (bni.com)
- National Association of Professional Women (napw.com)
- National Association of Realtors® (nar.realtor)
- National Sales Network (salesnetwork.org)

ONLINE

- Facebook Groups: Social Media Marketing for Real Estate Professionals, South Florida Real Estate Professionals, Real Estate Marketing Mastermind, Raise the Bar in Real Estate
- LinkedIn Groups: Real Estate Professionals Referral Group, PERE Network, Global Real Estate Opportunities Network
- Real Estate Discussion Boards: ActiveRain.com, AgentsOnline.net, BiggerPockets.com

3 Ways to Improve Your Networking Skills

1. Find the Right Event: You don't need to go to events to be an effective networker. You can simply make calls and send emails to customers and referral sources you already know. But if your goal is to get better at networking, you must find an event that aligns with the people you like and the business you're looking to do.

2. Dare to Be Different: When you attend events, differentiate yourself. Become known for one area of

expertise that you're passionate about, such as real estate auctions, beach rentals or luxury homes.

3. Get Involved: When you join organizations, be a board member, head a committee or run seminars. Make it your business to introduce others—be a connector! Be the first to sign up for events and fundraisers.

Source: Adapted from Michael Goldberg, author of the Knock Out Networking blog at 3minuterounds.com.