



**Julie Farmer  
Brunel House  
Volunteer Way  
Faringdon  
Oxfordshire  
SN7 7YR**

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## **Networking - Agenda**

Good evening my name is Julie Farmer and I run a virtual PA Business in Oxfordshire in the United Kingdom. I'm am a Virtual Assistant, A Virtual Personal Assistant or VPA and I am able to offer concierge services, I am also an experienced networker.

I would like to thank you for attending this seminar entitled 'Networking – Scatter or Cultivate – Taking the Farmer Approach. I know, I can hear the groans already, the title should have been Networking Professionally for Virtual Assistants, but what can I say.

During this seminar, I would like to take you through some of rules and regulations of networking. I will tell you a little about my background. I would then like to discuss [The Purpose of Networking](#) and what networking is to me.

I will discuss [The Types of Networking](#) and then take you through [A Walk Through a Networking Event](#) while explaining what networking can do for you and your business. What [the Costs](#) are of Networking and the other important aspects of networking that you many not have thought about, for example the importance of [Business Cards](#), what your [60 seconds](#) can say about you. What your [Appearance](#) tells your colleagues and what you should do [After the meeting](#).

I am hoping that this presentation will last for about 45 minutes and then I'm open to any questions you may have. I would like to say at this stage, if you have any questions please ask them, I am a firm believer that there are no wrong question, but only missed opportunity to get an answer. So remember there are no questions that can't be answered, there are no silly questions and this is a safe environment in which to ask. It is also worth remembering that if you have a question you can guarantee that five or six other people also have the same question but may be too nervous to ask. If you do feel that you are unable to ask your question, please drop me an email and I will try and answer it that way. I'm here to help and hopefully provide you with what I believe are the important rules of Networking.



## **Introduction**

As I mentioned at the beginning my name is Julie Farmer and I'm a business owner who runs a Virtual Assistant Business called myPA we offer Secretarial and administrative services to small and medium sized businesses in the United Kingdom. I started my business on my own in 2005 with a borrowed computer and a private mobile phone. I have been running my business for over six years and now have two offices and three members of staff that work for me directly and a number of other associates that I can call upon whenever necessary.

I believe that being a Virtual PA or Virtual Assistant is a noble profession and one that should be taken incredibly seriously, currently I feel that many people are under the assumption that a Virtual Assistant is like an unskilled typists who do nothing more than type the odd letter.

This cannot be further from the truth, being a virtual assistant is like being a business coach, an office manager, a secretary, a mother, a cleaner and everything else in between. It is my hope and passion that being a virtual assistant will become recognised as a profession in its own right and every time you go out to meet new clients, talk about your profession and attend a networking event you will carry that thought with you.

## **Purpose of Networking**

When I started my business in 2005 I hire a desk in a business centre borrowed a laptop computer and took my own personal mobile phone and sat there waiting to phone to ring. I expected that I would be inundated with call from people wanting to hire me to do the administration. Imagine my surprise when none of this happened, in fact it became very clear that no one knew that I had started my business. I started to talk to another small business owner and explained my predicament and he very kindly took me by the hand and took me to my very first networking meeting. Now what a surprise that was.

A whole new world had just opened up to me. A world that existed of small businesses all working together and supporting each other, although I had worked for small business before all of our clients had been from the corporate world so I had never come across the idea of networking in this way. I had never imagined that there could be so many small businesses and supporting each other and giving each other work and creating a small eco or macro business structure

Like many newbie's, I went to this networking meeting full of hope and anticipation. I was convinced that everyone in that room needed my services, would see how wonderful I was and how cost effective my services would be and how important my business would be to their business.

I got up at what is deemed a silly o'clock, 5 AM spent my time getting ready, picking up a business cards, my literature my phone and was ready to set this networking group alive. I walked in the room which happened to be in the local church hall and was greeted by 40 strangers all in suites all talking to each other as if they had known each other for years. To be honest, I felt totally overwhelmed and almost faded into



the background. One to the people came up to me and introduced themselves, all of whom wanted to sell me something.

In fact one of them wanted to offer me telephone answering services and wanted me to sign on the dotted line there and then. It was at this meeting that I discovered that the most important aspect of networking, which many people never seem to understand, when you are networking at any meeting you are there to create relationships, to meet new people and build trust. You have to meet someone at least 7 times before they become familiar with you and they can start to build that trust.

### **Promotion of your Business**

So in essence networking is about talking to people who you wouldn't have normally meet about you and your business and the skills you bring to your business so that they can then become your unofficial sales team.

The purpose of you going out to attend a networking event is to tell people that you have started your businesses, what your business is called and what you are actually doing. So every time you go to a networking event you become a walking brochure of your business. Now there are many ways to promote your businesses and I am quite sure many of you have tried some of these, for example advertising in the local paper, advertising on the internet, in the local supermarket or wherever you thought your target market would be, all of these are correct and some will work for you and some wont. Remember the old saying people by people, in a networking context, people buy people they know and trust.

You are also there to promote your business which is separate from you. For clients to hire a VA they generally look for compatible personalities and then professional services.

You also represent the profession of Virtual Assistants, so no pressure.

### **Types of Networking**

I would like to talk to you now about the two types of networking in my opinion, that of informal and formal networking.

There may be some other types of networking but I am going to discuss these ones today.

### **Informal Networking**

Informal Networking is probable the most effortless kind of networking that you will undertake, but never underestimate the power of informal networks. Informal networking can provide you with a major advantage when looking for new clients or contacts.

Informal networking is based on the principle of a shared exchange of information. There are limited rules to the meeting and advice is freely given and exchanged. This is in effect 'The Old boys network'.



Informal networks groups could be difficult to define. The network group could be a group of colleagues or friends with a common interest for example photography and in conversation someone may mention that Mr X is looking for some secretarial support. Other networking groups may be created through people you meet while travelling, attending church functions or simply someone you meet down the pub.

As a business owner your are never off the clock. Any opportunity to promote, market or sell your business is an important marketing opportunity. Do be careful though, you don't want to bore your family and friends every time you meet them. Use your common sense when you are in an informal networking environment.

### **Formal Networking**

Formal Networking often has an order to the proceedings, a structure that is adhered to at every meeting, it has leadership that relies on its membership to organise the club. There could be an eligibility criteria for membership and the need for self funding.

Going anywhere where you don't know anyone is very scary.

When you arrive at a networking group, in most instances, you'll sign in pay your entry fee. This can be anything from £5.00 up to £35.00 depending on what part of day you are meeting and where. (Don't forget to pick up a receipt). You will then go in to the meeting room and it is then up to you to start to talk to various people within the room.

### **The walk through**

Generally you will be given 30 minutes to introduce yourself to the people in the room and find out them and vice versa. You will then be asked to take a seat where the formal part of the meeting will then take place. Depending on the type of meeting you will then be called up to conduct your 60 second presentations, this could be 40 seconds and is also know as your elevator pitch there are a number of other names for this presentation but ultimately you that you're given the opportunity to stand up and tell the people in the room about you and about your business.

- [Examples of Formal Networking Meetings](#)
- BRX ([www.brxnet.co.uk](http://www.brxnet.co.uk))
- BNI ([www.bni-europe.com](http://www.bni-europe.com))
- Ecademy ([www.ecademy.co.uk](http://www.ecademy.co.uk)) Linked in

Don't forget the golden rule of networking, that you're not networking to the person that you're talking too, you are networking to his or her clients. I know that this is a very strange premise to appreciate but once you understand this **fundamental concept** you could become a first-class networker.

*Networking is all about small talk.* The philosophy behind Networking is all about creating relationships.



## **Membership - The Walk Through**

If you're standing in a line of people start a conversation say hello once you've signed in and you've paid your money there is an opportunity to open network that is me people within the room talk to them get to know them and generally let them get to know you. There is normally coffee or tea on the table on a table so that you can sit down and have a drink something to break the ice. This open networking generally takes about half an hour most benign meetings meet at 645 in the morning is absolutely imperative that you arrive on time if not before. Most people for being I meeting will arrive at site at 630.

Once everybody has had arrived and you've signed in your head at the Europa networking about seven o'clock you within all be taken into your meeting room and your breakfasts will be laid out to have a table laid out ages ago and sit down and you shall place again you are have us an opportunity of about two or three minutes to continue open networking. Then perform a networking will begin, the person who is chairing the meeting will stand up and start reading from a script during this time you will be able to eat your breakfast and drink your cheese and coffees. But you can't talk you must listen to what the chair of the meeting is talking about. There is a predefined script that he will or she will follow on the day on a weekly basis. This script will be followed each and every week there is no deviation from the script it with the same words and the same narrative spoken every single week.

During this meeting you have an opportunity to get up and present your 60 seconds, the elevator pitch. You will also listen to each and every other member of this networking group discuss their 60 seconds. There will be a presentation from one of the members of the group that will last 10 minutes about their business and about what they do and what kind of business they looking for. There is an education slot with somebody in the business will get up and four minutes give you some advice about networking, about growing the business chapter. All the general advice about how your business should be running is very useful aspect of the night and one that should be taken quite seriously there is a very good tips here.

After a 10 minute presentation your 60 seconds and the education slot think of is the most important aspect of being I meeting the referral section. Referrals are won't everybody in your group have been promoting your business and they will give you a referral slip that says I have spoken to Mr X about you and he needs your service you will think it's a referral slip you in turn will then have spoken to somebody about one or two of the members in your group so that you can give a referral.

P&O meeting meets each and every week attendant is compulsory as a member is your duty to turn up every single week. If you are unable to attend you'll need to send a substitute in your place who will need to reach out your 60 seconds. They will also have the opportunity to reach out their own 60 seconds about their own business. If you are unable to attend and returned you send your substitute is your substitute a wall have to have your breakfast and you are expected to pay that breakfast.

BNI is a membership networking group. One of the rules or obligations of being a member of BNI is that you will need to give a referral each and every week if you can't give a referral you will need to give a testimonial or a guest to the BNI meeting. So becoming a member of BNI isn't just about going down when networking it is also



about promoting your chapter outside of being I meeting taking the members of your PNI meeting with you when you go to business meetings with the you're with your clients or if you're in a shop near somebody say that they need for example of chiropractor is a new opportunity to turn round and settle I know somebody that.

Again this goes back to creating relationships creating trust that you are expected each and every week to bring at least one referral from one member of the group. This is a very strict networking group within these formal networking groups are other types of less formal groups are a prime example of that could be your local networking pre-turn out to meeting you pay your money and then you sit you have your open networking we can go and talk to anybody within the group and then the chair is called to order any surrounding circle you give your 60 seconds and that's that although there is a structure to this meeting it's less formal than the PNI although you still give your presentation and she still put other members of the group. You won't necessarily have to give referrals that can be done in the in formal networking.

### **Attendance**

When you Network, remember that you have decided that you are going to invest some of your very valuable time and effort out of the office meeting people that could potentially help your business grow. You are spending time away from making money and investing that time in promoting your business. Treat a Networking meeting just like any business meeting you would attend, have an agenda for this meeting.

For example:

What is going to be your objective at this networking event? Be specific, I want to speak to 10 new people? Do you want to promote a new product or serve? Or are you interested in finding someone to help you build a new website.

Also take note of when they meet at the early-morning meeting or it's an afternoon or evening meeting because you do have all of them and if you meet in the afternoon and make sure that you understand the verification so that if you meet in the afternoon as for example at lunchtime at 12 o'clock that will mean that you will need to leave your office or start to prepare for that networking meeting at ease 11 o'clock getting a business cards ready getting yourself ready get insight if it's long got to drive you can have your to a networking meeting and then get back that really you're leaving at 11 o'clock and has a lunchtime meeting you won't get that your office until 3 to 4 hours out of a busy 7 or 8 hour day.

Don't turn up to meetings every week and faded into the background or talk to the same people over and over again you are not there to do you are there to meet new people you are there to create relationships

This doesn't mean of course that you go into your networking meeting and you never talk to anybody or you always talk to the same people, that's wrong, make sure you talk to everybody in the group. Now it could be that if you turn up at one of your networking meetings there are 50 people there, you're not going to be at talk to 50



people and start to create a productive and symbiotic relationship with them but make sure that you talk to different people each time you turned up at the meeting.

Make sure that it is a weekly meeting you go on a weekly basis if its a monthly meeting you go on a monthly basis.

Attending regular meeting tells your fellow networking colleagues that you're serious about your business it tells them that you have made a commitment to turn up to meeting, that you value their time as you value the networking group. If you are a member and you don't turn up what kind of impression is that going to tell the members of the group. It tells them that you can't be bothered to turn up and that they are not important, that their businesses are not important if you've made a commitment to turn up, turn up.

One of the beauties of networking is that you can create a very good relationship very quickly one of the disadvantages of networking it is if you do a bad job it will get round very quickly. This is all word of mouth, people will speak very quickly about a good job and are recommended and will recommend you and if you do bad job they will also speak quite quickly about that, so remember it is your commitment to turn up and to the best of your ability.

### **Cost of Networking**

Membership to most networking groups will require a fee.

Joining fee and that range from anything from £100 up to £200

You will then pay a monthly fee if your meeting meets monthly to see if you're meeting we meets weekly there is a weekly fee this covers food and the rent of the room BNI £45. Pay even if you don't turn up

Other groups are £10 on the door if you turn up or you don't turn up.

- Don't forget to include your time,
- your petrol
- your printing costs when calculating the cost of attending a networking group.

Networking is a business meeting and needs to be dealt with in that way. You are there to promote yourself, your business and sell your products or services.

These are all costs you need to be wary of at all times.

Again, go back to the purpose of creating networking meetings attended networking meetings you go there to create a relationship with the people you are meeting so that they can help you promote your business in effect they become your sales team

### **Appearance**

The other important thing to remember about networking groups is that the majority of networking groups are run by their members and as a member you may be



expected to help run the team to help promote the group will to take an active role in getting more members. In my experience most virtual assistants when they talk about their business and what they do the most networking meetings there instantly asked to become one of the management team to help organise and promote the networking group. If you are asked to do this think very carefully is a great opportunity view to demonstrate your organisational skills within the group so that they can go out and promote you but it's also a task that you will undertake a very.

You will not get paid for it or very rarely will you get paid for it. But your profile with in that networking group will increase, people will understand your services and understand what you can do. It is a good opportunity if you are able to take it. You must be careful and make sure that you spent don't spend all of your time organising a networking group at running your business of looking at your clients

I have heard of one or two VA's taken on this task they sit down and for all the websites and get in contact with the academies the links in have found is that their business was that his suffering and then losing clients as they spend so much time organising and greeting good networking group that they forgot their primary role that is to grow their business and to ensure that their clients are being looked after.

If you join a networking group can only go once in a blue moon then you're not going to go to create rapport create a relationship with other members of the team's if you don't turn up they were now you are so they can't go out and promote you attendants to your networking meeting is vitally important you need to go you need to create a relationship he needs to find out what your fellow networking members to have a promote their business. You need to understand what services they could potentially provide you when your clients. In fact you don't become the expert the person that knows everything. If you know everything is also gives you enough opportunity aid to promote your business that be to subcontract out to get affiliates if you know that one of your clients needs a website they could get that website through you and then you from calling somebody who you network with to provide that service you can take a small introductory or percentage of fate depending on what the working relationship is. So the members of your networking team could potentially become part of your business indirectly to attending these meetings is vitally important you need to go down you need to make sure that you have seen you need to socialise any to mingle and you need to talk to people you need to talk to existing members meet and talk to any business that has led to any potential members.

### **Dress**

Just as important to remember at a networking event is your image and that of your businesses.

The image that you are going to portray for you have the opposite business and your profession simply were talking about appearance and unless his you and your attendant your appearance and what you're presenting at a networking meeting by going to a networking meeting you are in effect being the marketing material of your business it is you that they see you that they listen to say you are walking brochure if you have a brochure that you sent down to be printed and leaving going to hand out to any potential clients do a drop through any businesses stores all local business doors you wouldn't send out blip that piece of literature that article out with spelling



mistakes you wouldn't send it out on a scrappy piece of paper you would make sure that it looked good that is it worse keen precise it was has correct spelling it out that the correct message and betrayed the image of your business your brand correctly. Going to a networking meeting is exactly the same you are a walking brochure of your business so when you go to these meetings make sure that your appearance is exactly the same that you are a walking brochure of your business that doesn't mean to say that you need to go out and buy a T-shirt or a jacket that has your business name written all over it but it does mean that you need to have a patch that has your business card in it or any badgers got your logo on it and your name it means that when you turn up that you were dressed appropriately, now slightly old-fashioned or possibly a Victorian in this I believe that being a virtual assistant is a noble profession and that we need to promote the fact that we are professionals with good at what we do and we should be recognised as such my few years and I will not let any of my girls attend any meetings with a top that is so low you can see your belly button and a skirt that is so high you can see your belly button I will write my girls to be dressed appropriately for their profession they are professionals they represent me they represent my business they represent any of the clients that I work full or that they will do we work full they are my business cards when I go to networking meeting I am my business card I want people to see me as a professional I will be in a smart trouser suit or a skirt suit with clean shoes with my hair brushed styles my personal hygiene is correct a Web symposium I may not a Western make up I may not and not overpowering that I am a professional and I expect people to treat me as such I want them to know that my business is it proper business is not just a fly by night business might image is that of a professional business owner the image that that the girls who work for me is of a professional virtual assistant they wouldn't dream of turning up to work in jeans or going to a networking meeting in jeans it's just the business card that

I promote that you may have a totally different opinion of that and feel quite happy going to a networking meetings in your genes and that is absolutely fine if that is how you feel that make sure that your jeans are clean and tidy make sure that your appearance is clean and tidy first impressions count unfortunately it's a fact we are all judged on what you do what we say and how we look people will look at you and make a snap decision and it is very hard and very difficult to change that first impression is that when you turn up to a networking meeting make sure that you are the best that you can be make sure that your personal dress code is the best it can be and that is that it is the image that you want to portray in your business.

### **Language – verbal and body**

This will also apply to language again and probably little more Victorian than most people a little bit stuffy but I don't like bad language and I will not use it in my general speech and I certainly wouldn't use it in a networking meeting and very careful about what I say and how I say it again it all comes down to image is all about my business is creating a professional appearance because all of my clients are small businesses their plumbers their designers they go out and they promote their business but thereafter and a virtual assistant is somebody who can promote their business who can work for them and make their business look larger than Tangiers make it more professional that if you go out there in your swearing (centre your appearance isn't 100% what kind of image what kind of impression that you can give your potential clients that as far as they're concerned will then roll over and be an



image that is given to their business is so please think what you are going to any networking meeting remember what you're wearing remember what your parents looks like and remember your language languages is hugely important although people only listen to about 20% of what you say is the rest is taking up with your appearance on your commit your image but language is also very important.

Think also about your body language. If you enter the room with a miserable face, a miserable appearance how are people going to react to you? 80% of our language is visual. Make sure your using your 80% loudly and with passion. Lift your head, have a smile, give a good warm handshake and not a weak fingertip of a hand shake.

### **Business cards**

One of the easiest forms of marketing that you all marketing literature that you will take to a networking meeting is your business card and the these tiny little credit card size that Peters Ave advertising are one of the most important pieces of marketing material that you will ever have when you attend a networking meeting in sure that you have at your business cards to hand never turn up at a networking meeting without them put them in a pocket that is easily accessible

### **Handing out Business Cards**

Always carry sufficient Business Cards with you, but only give business cards out until asked for them. Don't walk distributing cards to all members of the networking group and not taking the time to speak to the person you are passing your card to or getting one of their cards in return. Keep your Business Cards close to hand, where they are convenient and easy to get to if someone asks for your card. Try and carry some cards in your jacket pocket or your hand bag. Don't make it difficult to get to your cards as you could put the person asking for the card ill at ease.

If you have your cards in easy reach also demonstrate that you are prepaid and ready for any questions about you or your business. If you have been asked for your business card always ask for there card in return. Once you have their card, look at the card and read the name of the company, the name of the person you are talking to. If you ask for a business card you will hold the power during the conversation, it is up to you to ask the questions, find out about his or her business. Don't be frightened about asking questions, people love to talk about themselves or their business.

### **60 Seconds**

#### **Your 60 Seconds or Elevator pitch**

The 60 seconds or your elevator pitch is a brief description of you and your business. 60 Seconds is equal to about 100 to 150 words. The context of What should be in your 60 Seconds or Elevator Pitch? An good elevator pitch should answers the following:

- Who are you and what is your company called
- What is the product or service you are offering



- How will the product or service benefit your listener
- What should your listener do to get the product or service
- Re-enforce who you are and what your company is called

Below are two examples of a 60 Seconds that is specific to myPA Business Limited offering Virtual PA and Recruitment Services. As with anything you need to test and measure what you say about your company and what promotional material works for you. Example number two said all the right things, but doesn't really give a clear picture of how the service could benefit the listener, in effect it didn't take a problem the listener could have and give a solution to that problem.

Ultimately, your 60 Seconds will be one that suits your style, suits your services and is something that you feel happy and comfortable saying in a room full of people.

### **Example One**

Good Morning, my name is Julie Farmer and I run a company called myPA, we offer or 'Pay that you go secretarial services'. We are able to offer a number of services from Credit Control, Audio Typing to Diary Management. This week one of my clients was on his way to a meeting and got lost. He called us, asked us to email him directions on his blackberry and contact his client and let them know he was running late. Our client was happy because we provided a valuable service to him and his client was happy as he was kept informed of the situation. So if you know of anyone who needs a virtual PA or secretary please give them my number, 01367 246003. My name is Julie Farmer from myPA, 'Pay as you go Secretarial Services'.

### **Break down of the 60 Seconds**

Who are you	Good Morning, my name is Julie Farmer
What is your company called	and I run a company called myPA,
What is the product or service you are offering	we offer or 'Pay that you go secretarial services'. We are able to offer a number of services from Credit Control, Audio Typing to Diary Management.
How will the product or service benefit your listener	This week one of my clients was on his way to a meeting and got lost. He called us, asked us to email him directions on his blackberry and contact his client and let them know he was running late. Our client was happy because we provided a valuable service to him and his client was happy as he was kept informed of the situation.
What should your listener do to get the product or service	So if you know of anyone who needs a virtual PA or secretary please give them my number, 01367 246003.
Who are you	My name is Julie Farmer
What is your company called	from myPA, 'Pay as you go Secretarial Services'.



You don't need to say any more than that and you sit down such people in the group you listen to 30 people 60 seconds if you're able to take on a paper which you and take notes that there will be people there that you will be to get to talk to that copy of interest right down their names and telephone numbers or write down their names and go and see them afterwards and grow their business cards if at all possible go out and say that you like to meet them at a later date convenient to them and yourself so you can discuss their it their business services in great step to explain who and what you are amateurs setting up your business or that you're a virtual PA because you're trying to grow your bank of contacts to your clients for example if you will looking after and organisations and programmable group consultancy and you know he needs to have business cards published print it than knowing a good printer will be an advantage you at the same time you could be in contact with this printer and get some kind of affiliation going that they have an introductory fee or that you get preferential rates of your clients are going down and networking meeting you speak to people is vitally important part of your business day to underestimate the power of networking word-of-mouth is the one thing that will grow your business and make your business grow from strength to strength.

### **Small Talk**

When you are at a networking event, remember that everyone is there has also made the decision to spend some of their valuable time out of the office to network as well. So don't monopolise any one person's time. It is a good rule of thumb to spend a maximum of 10 minutes with each person, this should give you enough time to find out about them, their company and for you to tell them about you. At the end of the conversation say, "It was good to meet you and find out about you and your company. Perhaps we could have coffee in the near future to see if there is any synergy