

Work the room but make sure you develop a good technique

At a recent networking night for students it was 45 minutes before one student broke away from the huddle of drinkers to approach Kaleidoscope chief executive Kylie Green.

And this was just as Green, whose company is a leading group in brand activation and delivery, had decided to head home.

At the last moment, students thronged about her, asking for her business card. Not one had a card to give Green and only one followed up with an email, providing contact details and little else. It was an opportunity lost to connect with a possible employer, says Green.

Before you start handing out business cards, you have to decide which events are worth your time.

Green attends a lot of business events but is invited to many more. She recommends asking if you can go along once or twice at no cost to see if it is something that you are going to benefit from.

“All too often you get lured in by marketing ploys and pay a lot of money for the membership, and find that it’s not the people that you want

to know what you want and be open to opportunities, writes **Marian Edmunds**.

to be networking with,” she says.

A good way of developing networks is to volunteer for the committee organising events or get elected to the board, she says.

“You get to meet all your competitors, make some fantastic friendships and you hear a lot of what’s going on in the industry.”

She has also joined charity boards and found that to be a great way of widening her network.

Taine Moufarrige also likes to get to know people before he enters the room.

Moufarrige is executive director of Servcorp, the first Australian company to provide serviced and virtual offices, and the second-largest such provider in the world, operating in 13 countries.

His first steps before attending events overseas are to contact Austrade and to join business groups such as the European

Australian Business Council. He is also a member of Rotary.

Moufarrige says he always sees Austrade and the Australian business groups first because they provide the easiest access to a relevant network of business people.

“That way when you walk in the room you say ‘g’day’ and everyone says ‘g’day’,” he says.

He also suggests sponsoring an event or providing facilities or services.

So you have identified your chosen event and you are armed with a fistful of business cards. What do you do in the room?

Simon Hammond, executive chairman of brand agency Belong, says you have to get across what you stand for.

“In a conversation don’t be demure, don’t be wallpaper, don’t be vanilla. Have a clear belief, because for every person you annoy,

you will excite someone else,” he says.

Networking is the first frontier of personal branding. Hammond says you should be unafraid to give your view, then ask others for theirs.

“Even if your opinion isn’t popular, if it’s well thought out and makes me think differently, that will create a good impression,” he says.

Hammond says it is worth targeting people you want to speak to “and then just have something to say”.

Green says it is important to decide on your unique selling proposition.

“But keep it simple, and allow them to ask questions, and let it lead into further conversation,” she says.

She suggests a little background reading on the relevant websites if you know who is going to be in the room. But she also has a rule that she aims to meet two people she doesn’t know at every event.

Hammond says networking is all about the art of conversation and reading people.

“Don’t overstay your welcome — if there’s no natural flow of conversation, just say ‘good to meet

you, I’ve wanted to meet you, this is why,’ and move on,” he says.

The etiquette of business cards is important, Green says. Look at the card, make an observation about the card you are given, she says. Many people make the basic mistake of not taking cards.

Hammond adds that cards should come out later rather than earlier in most cases.

“If they thrust the business card at me straight away, it’s not as good as if we have a discussion, there’s interest, and we say, ‘well, maybe we can have a chat some time, here’s my card.’”

Kym Kranen is a business adviser, educator and networker who runs Solutions 4 Success business advisory and networking sessions. She says people should forget about working the whole room and concentrate on meaningful conversations and relationship building.

“It’s not about harvesting business cards,” Kranen says.

“You can learn when you listen to people, and everyone loves to be listened to.”