

This article first appeared in **Banking Technology** on 01.12.08.

Christmas networking tips for bank IT executives

By **Jack Downton**

What with the turkey, the kids' nativity play and what to buy Aunt Mildred this year, Christmas seems to demand more and more from you each year. Do you really, therefore, want to go to yet another work-related Christmas party?

Well yes actually, you do. Christmas business parties present a fantastic opportunity to make great business contacts and put you in touch with people that may just come in handy both now and in the years to come (particularly important given the current bad economic conditions).

Whilst some people have a natural gift for 'working the room', many dread networking events and find the prospect of a room full of strangers more stressful than Christmas shopping on Oxford Street.

Networking is a skill and, like all skills, can be improved with practice and a few tips.

Preparation

- Remember your business cards.
- Think about how you will introduce yourself as well as answer succinctly the inevitable questions such as "And what do you do?"

Creating a good first impression

- Smile, make eye contact and approach people confidently
- Introduce yourself, e.g. "Hello, my name's Sarah. Do you mind if I join you?"
- Repeat people's names so you remember them.
- Have questions ready to kick-start a conversation, e.g. "How far did you have to travel this evening", "Done most of your Christmas shopping?"

Building Rapport

- Be interested in them.
- Listen and ask open questions – How..., Why..., What...?
- Don't rush into business

“And what do you do?”

- Say who you work for and then the **benefit** of what you do
- Keep your answer short – no more than 10 seconds

The Great Escape

- Be honest! It looks bad if you say you have to go and then are caught talking with someone else!
- Say something like, “Peter, I must move on as there are a couple of people I want to meet this evening. It's been good talking to you?”
- Getting their card puts you in control

Follow-up

- Follow up within forty eight hours
- Consider enclosing a relevant article with a handwritten note
- Pass on leads internally.

So enjoy. You might find you get a lot more out of the holiday season this year than a pair of socks!

Jack Downton is the managing director of The Influence Business Ltd (<http://www.TheInfluenceBusiness.com/>). He specialises in coaching senior executives on improving their influence and how they present themselves. Contact: Jack.Downton@TheInfluenceBusiness.com.