

NEVER UNDERESTIMATE THE VALUE OF THE WRITTEN WORD

By Mindy Ferrentino Wolfle

*But words are things, and a small drop of ink,
Falling like dew, upon a thought, produces
That which makes thousands, perhaps millions, think.*

~ Lord Byron



I am often asked ways to maximize the networking experience. Networking is so much more than simply being “out there” and building up a huge (and probably not very effective) email directory. The savvy networker capitalizes on the value of the written word. I realized early on that it's important to me professionally, and to the firm where I work, to have the business community recognize our involvement. I started by volunteering to contribute articles to various newsletters of organizations that focus on networking, including professional groups and industry associations. Writing articles, and having your name associated with them, is an effective way to expand your network. It opens the door for people to contact you and for the exchange of ideas to flow.

Not everyone can or wants to write articles. That's why thank you notes, notes of congratulations, notes of sympathy, notes expressing simple kindnesses, reflect who you are. Take time to acknowledge people. The easiest way is to drop someone a line. Yes, you may wish to rely on email, but sending a handwritten note has much more impact. People don't write notes anymore, and they should. Remember back when your mother insisted that you compose a thank you note to Aunt Gertrude, expressing your appreciation for the “lovely” orange and maroon mohair hat and mitten set she sent you in July? As Aunt Gertrude and mom knew, there is an inherent value in composing a personal note.

While you are sure to have a resume or even a lengthy curriculum vitae, do you have a professional biography? Most resumes look pretty much the same and don't provide for very interesting reading. A professional biography can give a more in-depth idea of exactly who you are. It will make you stand out. Use your professional biography to describe your business philosophy and what you've done, the organizations you're involved in, and the recognition you've received. Professional biographies can be used in numerous and unexpected ways. We're hearing more about “personal branding.” I can think of no better way to identify your own brand than by getting it down in print.

How you present yourself using the written word has a great deal to do with networking. It's not just about verbal communication, face-to-face encounters and the hour or two spent with people in a networking setting. Networking can have long range effects, even ten or more years later — it comes back to do good things for you. It's about giving without expecting to receive. Part of that giving is your word. Despite the availability of technology tools, such as email, instant messaging, and more, the written word is still a powerful tool and should be an important part of your professional networking agenda. In fact, the Web, email, and instant messaging have only expanded the written word's range and deepened its impact.