

Why All Professionals Need Business Cards

Shôn Ellerton, July 18, 2023

Ditch the clumsy ceremony of exchanging contact details with a smartphone. Use a business card instead.



A long time ago, as a kid, I remember frequenting a local steakhouse nearby to where we lived in Colorado Springs. It was called the Trail Dust Steakhouse. It was, essentially, a big barn with an open grill area where the steaks were prepared. Scattered in the large open space were long rows of tables. It was dimly lit and had a smoky and warm atmospheric feeling about it. But this steak house had a tradition. The tradition was to never ever wear a necktie unless you want to have it destroyed. And, of course, this was the place to bring your worst tie that you wanted to get rid of, because if you were spotted wearing a tie, the server will alert everyone in the room by shaking a large cowbell. Everyone will become silent with all eyes on the transgressor with the necktie. After a little speech mockingly reprimanding the customer of daring to wear a tie, the server would have, poised in hand, an extraordinary large pair of scissors and would proceed to cut off the tie near the knot. The server would then ask if the customer would like to give out a business card for taking part in this peculiar ritual. The tie would then be allocated a space on the interior walls of the restaurant along with a business card should one be given. Folks, locally and visiting, proudly gave business cards to this establishment for so many years leaving thousands of ties and business cards pinned up along the walls of the restaurant. And gosh, there were some heinously ugly ties not fit to be seen anywhere in society.

Sadly, much of the professional world, at least in Western society, has foregone the trusty business card staking it as being an obsolete remnant of the past in which today's technology through the use of smart phones have rendered them

obsolete. Tradies and independent business owners still rely on them, but much of today's white-collared workforce employed in large organisations have opted not to support them anymore excepting that for those in the upper ranks of the business.

Throughout my more than twenty-five years in industry starting from a graduate civil engineer to a project director, I have been given a stack of business cards by the organisation to which I was employed. Moreover, I was strongly encouraged to use them. Not only to sell my own brand, but also to provide a very cost-effective way of advertising the business to others who may come across my business card. It came to some surprise to me that some organisations are denying the issue of business cards to their employees when requested. It happened to me one time in a consultancy firm and I asked why in utter bewilderment. The response I got was that only those in the upper echelons of the organisation would receive them, but other than that, there was no logical explanation as to why they were denied to others. More perplexingly was the fact that the business has been very actively promoting on how to sell oneself to new clients and how to represent the business in a professional manner. And yet, the humble business card was not even considered for discussion.

Other reasons were hypothesized in that discussion why business cards were not promoted. Foremost of the reasons discussed was that today's technology has rendered them obsolete with the ability of passing on contact information through smartphones. No doubt that smartphone technology is useful in many ways, but it presents a clumsy and ill-refined way of exchanging contact details when meeting new people interested in your business. I, for one, find that using a smartphone has its challenges. For one, I have fat fingers which makes it difficult to enter someone's details without having to continuously backtrack to correct my mistakes. Second, I don't want a large, new, and fancy smartphone that requires a briefcase to carry. I want to keep it in my pocket or in the inner lining of my jacket. Call me old-fashioned, but I tend to use it for phone calls and text alone. Third, it takes up more time to exchange details. With business cards, not only can you provide someone with all your information, you can do it with grace and elegance. If one wants to embrace the new with the old, a QR code can be added to your business card so that it can be scanned straight into one's contact file. Four, business cards are 'for keeps'. They are a physical and tactile object. Much like the kid collecting his footy or baseball cards, there are some professionals who like to collect business cards. And finally, while all this

rigmarole is occurring during the clumsy ceremony of taking contact details using a smartphone, the ultimate embarrassment ensues when the other person effortlessly presents to you a business card. This has happened to me on many occasion and I had to make some lame excuse that I ran out of business cards and awaiting a batch of new ones.

Unless there is some policy that *prohibits* you from using a business card to represent your organisation, it is not terribly difficult to circumvent the problem of being denied business cards by simply printing them on your own. With today's online business card ordering services, it is extremely easy to design your own card in line with the corporate branding documentation you can find in your organisation. Moreover, it really doesn't cost very much either. For around USD \$100, you should be able to print out, at least, 500 one-sided business cards. Instead of debating with corporate policy and then to await a dispensation for you to be issued with business cards, just do them yourself. I did.

Being highly community minded, I make an effort to attend other professional and charity-based organisations outside of work. It is also a platform to spread one's DNA so to speak. Forming new business relationships cannot be had without bonding with others. Anyone who has attended a business connections workshop or function will, no doubt, have been encouraged to introduce yourself to others, many of which will be total strangers, and to make a quick pitch of what you do. During this time, and it may not be for very long, one should spend most of this time engaged in valuable conversation, maintaining eye contact, and not waste time fumbling around on smartphones, which are also highly distracting. Instead of the question of asking to exchange details, surely it is easier to offer someone with a business card. This, of course, prompts the other person to reciprocate should they have a business card. One will find that most, if not all, who attend a business connections function will have business cards. One might be able to get away with it on the odd occasion, but it looks genuinely unprofessional not to be armed with a business card. For those who attend a gathering of professionals, it is highly likely that someone will ask you if you have a business card.

Eastern society is somewhat different in my experience, particularly with Asian countries in which the tradition of offering something to someone is likened to almost being ritual like. In such circumstances, it would be deemed rather coarse, on receipt of a business card, to casually stuff it in the back pocket of your trousers. That business card would, in many cases, be given to you with *both* hands and it

is expected that those receiving should demonstrate the same degree of deference and respect. That business card would be carefully inserted into your wallet or, if you want to go the whole hog, into a special business card holder. However, I'm not going that far.

On the choice of business cards, should you have to make them yourself, think about how it reflects your brand and your business. If it is your own business, keep consistent with your branding design. If you are printing on behalf of your corporation, maintain as much as possible along the branding guidelines which should be available to all employees. On the practical side, I have a personal preference to one-sided printing on matte material, reason being that there is a nice big empty space to write on the back and being matte, it is pen and pencil-friendly. It is a personal thing, but in the white collar world, two-sided printing is not elegant. Choose a nice *feel* instead using a textured paper, for example, a soft woven or laid pattern. Less is more. And keep the background white or near-white. In other walks of life, for example, a plumber or an electrician, a glossy and colourful card may be appropriate as they are perfect candidates for being stuck with magnets on a fridge, easy to see, and near indestructible. Magnetised business cards for tradies are great for refrigerators!

Finally, business cards are a cheap and effective way for businesses to promote their brand, intentionally and unintentionally. Intentionally by actively engaging with others professionally and socially and handing out business cards should the topic of a potential business opportunity could arise. And unintentionally, as described earlier, an example being of discovering that tacked-on business card next to a cut-off necktie on the interior walls of a steak house or those business cards one often discovers in little bowls in the lobbies of motels, especially in the United States. Ultimately, a polished and refined business card is a valuable asset to the professional *and* to the company to which that professional belongs to. Unless there is strong grounds or some peculiar reason as to the denial of issuing business cards, it is practically a 'no-brainer' in terms of marketing for any organisation.