

# NETWORKING OFFLINE

WOMAN-RUN EVENTS AND ONLINE NETWORKING TOOLS PROVE B2B, FACE-TO-FACE NETWORKING AS THE NO. 1 WAY TO GROW BUSINESS BY KRISTINE CANNON

Many business owners have embraced Facebook and Twitter as a way to build virtual relationships with their customers.

“As far as social media goes, I think it has allowed people to believe that they can (network) very easily, and that they can do it well,” says Raven Valdes, owner of Raven Events.

But are those businesses’ face-to-face networking skills up to par? Two networking powerhouses, Raven Events and NetworkingPhoenix.com, help make networking easy by providing a means to navigate and filter through the hundreds of available mixers, as well as providing their own business-to-business (B2B) networking events.

Gelie Akhenblit, founder of NetworkingPhoenix.com, says although the ease of online networking has made global communication possible, people are more interested in doing business with others in their community.

NetworkingPhoenix.com is an online resource for the Valley business networking community listing more than 500 events with more than 18,000 registered members.

“People ask me if I think my business will change once the economy recovers,” Akhenblit says. “Face-to-face networking will never go out of style. Networking will always be the No. 1 way to find jobs, clients and meet key people.”

These B2B networking mixers provide a platform where like-minded individuals can make their introductions in hopes to build long-lasting relationships, according to Valdes.

“To all of the exhibiting businesses at my networking events, I encourage them all the time to be proactive,” Valdes says. “There’s not problem with walking up to somebody, shaking their hands, telling them who you are, what you’re about, and why they need to know you.”

While talking business is important, Akhenblit emphasizes that gaining clients and referrals is made through building friendships, instead of treating networking

events as sales opportunities, which she says is not true networking.

Valdes emphasizes the personal, human aspect of face-to-face, B2B mixers and networking events that emailing, Facebook and Twitter can’t provide.

“(B2B networking events) are beneficial because there’s still nothing more important than the handshake or looking to somebody’s eyes,” Valdes says. “You can’t really evolve that kind of confidence through any other way, without this face to face.”

Both NetworkingPhoenix.com and Raven Events, which has a mailing list of more than 35,000 people, have witnessed an increase in attendance for the three and nine years they have been in business, respectively. NetworkingPhoenix.com’s Signature Event, held four times a year, attracts more than 1,500 networkers. Raven Events, holds social and B2B events with attendance ranging from 400 to 1,500 people.

According to Akhenblit, B2B mixers also provide a way to save time scheduling many meetings a week, as well as getting valuable feedback about your business.

“Talking to people out and about is a great way to gather research,” Akhenblit says. “People are happy to share their opinions about our company, our products, their experiences, etc.”

Valdes adds that networking events are not only providing an outlet to build friendships, connections and possible business, but they are also supporting the local economy.

“Raven Events is not only bringing fun, effective events to people of the Valley, but it is also hiring entertainers,” Valdes says. “I hire photographers, DJs, bands and others in the industry — even comedians and magicians. I market and brand them throughout my process of the event, and the participating exhibitors within the event, too.”

For a calendar of upcoming networking events, visit [www.RavenEvents.com](http://www.RavenEvents.com) or [NetworkingPhoenix.com](http://NetworkingPhoenix.com). **ADZ**

Photo by Jerry Portelli

**Gelie Akhenblit,**  
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