



HOW TO BUILD A THRIVING NETWORK

BY **JUSTINE CLAY** OF [PITCH PERFECT PRESENTATION](#)

As a business coach for creative professionals, I've learned that most freelancers and entrepreneurs are happier, do better work and make more money when they have a thriving network of trusted collaborators, supporters and advisors.

If you're ready to let go of your old ideas about networking and open yourself up to the unlimited potential and opportunities out there, here are the 3 steps to finding your tribe, building a thriving network, and having fun along the way.

STEP 1

LAY THE GROUNDWORK

Do you know the difference between freelancers who make great money, working with clients they love and those in permanent hustle/scramble mode?

Successful entrepreneurs and freelancers focus their efforts where they will get the best results in the least amount of time. This isn't about quick fixes or skipping steps, but doing the necessary work and planning ahead of time so you set yourself up for success. Here's what you'll need to have in place before you start:

1. Your compelling pitch
2. Your ideal client profile

So let's give you the 'how' to nailing those down:

HOW TO CRAFT YOUR COMPELLING PITCH

I realize the term 'elevator pitch' is pretty loaded, which is why I never use it. I also don't believe a 1-minute, jam packed monologue ever feels natural, or inspires genuine connection. That said, you have just a few seconds to make a great first impression, so it's important you're clear on what you do, who you do it for, how they benefit from working with you, and what they need to do next to hire you. Here's what a compelling pitch should include:

- Your ideal client description
- The results people get from working with you
- The benefit of this result
- What you sell
- What makes you unique and stand out from your competitors
- How they can work with you

To do: Start crafting your compelling pitch using the structure above. The most important thing to remember is it should be a conversation starter, not something you'll say in full. Your goal is to pique the other person's interest so they ask to hear more.

KNOW WHO YOUR IDEAL CLIENT IS

As much as I want you to enjoy networking, none of us have time to be out every night, so you need to be strategic. The next step to setting yourself up for success is getting crystal clear on who your ideal client is. Because when you know who your ideal client is, what they struggle with and what they need, you have CLARITY, and that's a beautiful thing!

So what makes someone an ideal client? They:

- Know they need your help
- Recognize working with you is essential
- Are easily contactable
- Will pay your fees without negotiating
- Will get results from working with you
- Will refer others
- Are people you will enjoy working with

Don't those kinds of clients sound great? Here's what you need to know to craft your ideal client profile:

- The industry they work in e.g. publishing, food, fashion etc.
- Title (may be more than one) e.g. art director, creative director, Marketing Director
- Sensibility
- Values
- Personality/style
- What their issues and struggles and aspirations are
- What they need right now

I can't emphasize the importance of getting to know your ideal client enough (so I'll try by bolding and italicizing it!). It's the key to finding your tribe, creating content, and tailoring your services to serve them. If you're not crystal clear on this, I'd recommend you invest some time focusing on developing your ideal client profile. I promise, you'll be happier, more effective and more successful as a result.

STEP 2

KNOW WHO SHOULD BE IN YOUR NETWORK

Networking is not about being the most-connected person, but the *best-connected* person. A strong network is a mix of close allies and looser acquaintances. Your allies are the people in your inner circle; your collaborators, accountability partners and centers of influence. Your loose acquaintances might include people you admire, those who work in different industries, live in different cities (or even countries), and provide diversity and strength to your network. By connecting with both types, you'll develop a support network of collaborators, resources, inspiration and referral partners.

There are 4 key groups that you should have in your network:

1. Clients (because good clients refer other good clients)
2. Strategic Alliances (people who do something different from you, but serve the same ideal client)
3. Trusted Advisors (business advisors, mentors, vendors, etc.)
4. Referral Sources (your unpaid sales force)

To do: Look at your network and see where it's strong and where you need to fill in some gaps. For example, if you're growing your design business with the intention of landing bigger, better projects, your focus might be on developing relationships with great creatives such as web developers and strategists so you can build an entire team.

STEP 3

KNOW WHERE YOUR CLIENTS HANG OUT

Now you've identified what you do and who your ideal client is, you need to come out from behind the computer and get out and meet them. But where do you find them?

There are lots of organizations that have already gathered large lists of your ideal clients for you, all you need to do is tap into them. Go back to your ideal client profile or avatar and ask yourself (or better still, your ideal clients) the following:

- What professional associations do my ideal clients belong to?
- What conferences do they attend?
- Where do they hang out? (private clubs etc.)
- What trade pubs, blogs and newsletters they read?
- Who do they follow on social media?
- What podcasts do they listen to?

Answering these questions will help you identify where your clients are hanging out - on-line and off. When you're armed with this valuable information, you can strategically choose the events you go to and enter with a clear plan of who you want to meet, what you'd like to share with them and what you'd like the outcome to be.

OK, you're ready to go! If you're new to networking, take it one step at a time and get just one event in your calendar. Once you've got your feet wet, try a few different places on for size - go back to the ones you like, skip the ones you don't. Before you know it, your network will be full of like-minded allies and resources you can give and receive support from.

Here's to your success!

BIO

Justine Clay is a speaker and business coach for creative entrepreneurs and freelancers. Through a series of clear, actionable steps, Justine will teach you how to identify what makes you stand out from the crowd, create a marketing message that resonates with your ideal clients,

and build a successful and fulfilling creative business or career. Sign up for Justine's free 6-part video series at www.6stepstomoredreamclients.com and start growing your creative business or career today!

TIPS & STRATEGIES

1. Adopt an attitude of “what can I do for you?” rather than “what can you do for me?”
2. Have business cards (and use them judiciously)
3. Know your elevator pitch
4. Know your ideal client profile
5. Make eye contact
6. Be genuine
7. Bring your whole self to the event. If you’re a mum, there’s no need to hide that fact. (It’s also not an excuse to talk about your kids all night, or whip out the photo album!)
8. Don’t be shy about sharing ‘non-professional’ things. You might find that the person you’re speaking with also has a passion for skydiving.
9. Be interesting
10. Be interested
11. Be gracious. No looking over a person’s shoulder to see if someone more interesting arrived
12. If you see someone who’s alone, invite him/her to join your conversation
13. Be succinct. Interactions should be short and sweet
14. Don’t monopolize someone (or let them monopolize you). I find that in either situation, simply saying “I don’t want to hog you all night, it’s been great meeting you” will do the trick.
15. Be OK with being uncomfortable. It’s a rare person who can walk into a room full of strangers and be totally at ease.
16. Be kind to yourself. Sometimes it goes better than others and that’s OK
17. Dress the part
18. Smile, Smile, Smile
19. Pay attention to your posture. Shoulders back, chin up and make sure nothing’s crossed
20. Shake hands when you introduce yourself and again when you exit saying ‘it was nice meeting you’ (sounds basic, but lots of people don’t do it!)