

Neurodivergent Networking Survival Guide

For Self-Employed Business Owners



About This Survival Guide



Greetings and good day to you!

Running a small business or being self-employed can feel like a solo mission at times. Networking helps change that.

It's not just about gaining exposure for you and your business, it's about building a circle of support. A good network connects you with like-minded business owners who can share advice, solve problems, and even fill the gaps in skills or services you don't have time to tackle yourself.

But let's be honest: if you find social interactions tricky, the idea of “*going networking*” can feel like scaling a mountain made of small talk and sensory overload. The noise, the people, the pressure to perform, ARGHHH! It can be a lot.

Why we created this ‘Survival Guide’

This is a collection of practical, easy-to-use tips to help you approach networking in a way that works for you and your brain. These ideas are based on our real-world, lived experience, but they're not one-size-fits-all, take what resonates, tweak what you need, and leave the rest.

And hey, we'd love to keep improving this resource. If you've got your own great strategies or funny stories, share them with us, we might add them, with full credit to you, of course!.

Email your feedback to hosts@businessoddcast.com



Warm regards,



Hannah Logan & Stuart Morrison
Business Oddcast Hosts

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1 Why Business Networking Matters



Positive Benefits

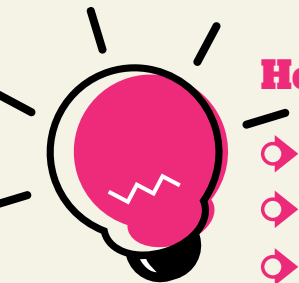
- Networking can help you and your business in the following ways:
 - new contacts - ‘open doors’ and make new connections
 - new clients - although avoid selling ‘in the room’
 - collaborations - bringing new and interesting ideas
 - referrals - sharing your network with others
 - mentoring - guidance from experienced owners
- For small business owners, it’s often essential for growth and visibility.
- Business growth, improving sales and widening the reach of your messages
- Personally rewarding when you meet your “clan” or “tribe”

But, we know from first-hand experience that for neurodivergent business owners traditional networking can feel draining, confusing, or overwhelming.

How This Guide Helps

- ◈ Acknowledges the challenges of going networking for ND business owners
- ◈ Prepares you with strategies to protect your energy, before, during & after events
- ◈ Recognizes good opportunities and helps you avoid the bad ones!
- ◈ Build relationships in ways that work for YOU, not just the “*extrovert model*”
- ◈ Lots of hints, tips & insights to help reduce the overwhelm (learned the hard way!)

Networking isn’t about being loud or fake; it’s about authentic connection on your terms. accomodating your sensory needs, energy and schedule.



2 Neurodivergent Business Networking Challenges

Why does traditional networking often feel like sensory chaos or a social puzzle? Acknowledging the issues, and understanding them is a key step before we share insights, and guidance on how to overcome common issues that may prevent you from gaining the benefits of going business networking.

Key Issues



Noise overload
chattering voices,
background music,
glasses clinking.



Bright or flashing lights
fluorescent bulbs, LEDs,
projectors, or event
photography.



Unspoken rules
when to speak, how
long to stay, or how to
exit a conversation



Masking fatigue
hiding your authentic
self for hours, wearing
uncomfortable clothes



Small talk stress
repetitive questions
like, “What do you do?”
can feel exhausting.



Overcrowded rooms
hard to focus, nowhere
to retreat, people
EVERYWHERE!



No structure
events that drag on
with no clear flow,
structure or schedule.



Social anxiety
fear of being misunderstood,
seen as “awkward”, “rude” or
“slow on the uptake”

The Impact

- Understanding these pain points helps you plan ahead and protect yourself.
- Missing events entirely can mean fewer opportunities for your business.
- Networking fatigue can lead to burnout and avoidance.

Acknowledging your needs ahead of time can improve your plans, coping strategies and create more productive opportunities!



3 Why Networking is Worth It (Even If It's Hard)

Whilst we acknowledge and understand the challenges first hand of choosing to go networking to widen your circle and build a better business, we also accept the massive upside and benefits to our businesses. Just because it is hard, doesn't mean you shouldn't do it. Below are some of the benefits of going networking, whether you are ND or not.

The Upside



Widen your circle
a large network of contacts helps you build your business.



Local expertise
be seen as a local resource and thought leader in your sector.



Access to insights
industry knowledge and trends allows you to stay up to date.



Socialising with purpose
it's good to get out the office and see what others are doing



Increased confidence
as you grow your business and share your story & skills.



Mentoring & Experience
more experienced owners share valuable tips learned from years in business



Accountability
find like-minded people who can help you stay motivated.



Referral network
build a trusted circle of business owners who can amplify your sales message

Quality Counts

- Focus on quality over quantity – one meaningful connection is worth more than 20 rushed conversations.
- You don't have to attend every event – choose those that fit your energy and goals.

Trust is built over time, focus on how you can add value to those you meet. Can you make useful introductions for them? Connect them with someone who can help, or share knowledge or resources that demonstrates your skill & experience?



4 Your ND Networking Game Plan

The “ND Networking Game Plan” covers three specific areas;

- **Event Prep** - ensuring all is planned and prepared **BEFORE** event day.
- **Boss Battle** - LET'S GET READY TO RUMBLE, it's the big day...
- **Event Aftermath** - retreat, reflect & recover, what were your wins & worries?

Event Prep

01 Research the Event 02 Have a Plan B

Check the venue, assess the facilities so you can plan what you might need to take to accommodate your specific needs. If you can visit, great. If not, stalk them online!

Check out the event, review their socials, assess what their events are like. Do they match your vibe or available energy?

Know anyone who has gone before? Can they give you any insights or maybe come along again with you?

Prevent organisational stress on the day and plan your journey to and from the venue. Check routes, timings, time-tables and buy tickets, or prep your vehicle the day before travelling.

Ensure your “go bag” is packed & prepped with food, drink and headphones, ear plugs or sunglasses, or with whatever your needs require.

If something goes wrong on the day, what is your fallback?

Could there be traffic, is there an alternative route?

What will the weather be like and will you require additional clothing?

What if the event is really busy or, worse in some ways, what if there's only one or two people?

Prepare some talking points, or conversation openers. Find common ground with the people you speak to, your chat **DOESN'T** have to be solely about your business.

If you can't face it when you get there, that's OK, but have your excuse ready; “urgent msg from a customer” is always useful...

Polish your plan

With each event you build and polish the perfect plan!

- Write down your plan and review after the event and update it if something unexpected happened.
- Just because you planned it doesn't mean you **HAVE** to attend the event. Be kind to yourself and mindful of your energy.



5 Your ND Networking Game Plan

The “ND Networking Game Plan” covers three specific areas;

3.1) Event Prep - ensuring all is planned and prepared BEFORE event day.

3.2) Boss Battle - LET’S GET READY TO RUMBLE, it’s the big day...

3.3) Event Aftermath - retreat, reflect & recover, what were your wins & worries?

Boss Battle

03 During the Event

Find a quiet corner, or if that’s not possible find a calm conversation. Hannah and Stu find sitting helps, if it’s acceptable at the event.

Step outside or ‘use the loo’ if you’re overwhelmed, don’t “grin and bear it”. Adapt to the event, find a quiet spot, even if that means sitting in your car.

Grab a drink, avoid caffeine if it makes you jittery, it can add to your anxiety. A cup of sweet tea might work? Or bring your own; blame dietary requirements :-)

Stand near the food/drink, people usually gather nearby, makes it easy to start conversations whilst waiting for a drink or food.

There’s no shame in leaving early, a quite, discreet exit is usually OK. If a more formal event, then a brief goodbye to the host is good manners.

04 Stay Calm

Ensure you check in with your emotional state. Overwhelm and dysregulation can creep up unnoticed.

Use grounding techniques to reduce anxiety, Stu suggests 5 deep breaths, and/or box breathing then find 5 items the same colour in the room. Helps reduce panicky sensations.

Ask people opened ended questions about themselves. Think of it like a mini-interview and see how much you can get them to speak. Listening allows you to slow your breathing too.

Make a note of contacts. Some events circulate details after, or simply ask if you can take a photo, of them or their badge. It helps jog your memory later and you can make a note of their business and connect online.

Remember...

It can seem like THE most important event ever, but...

- There’s not a single networking event that will make/break your business, so if you mess up, don’t worry!
- If you do end up chatting with a “complete dick”, make an excuse and move on. You’re there to find like-minded business owners, not talk to idiots!



6 Your ND Networking Game Plan

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Event Aftermath

05 After the Event

Collate your contacts, and any info you gleaned. Ensure you pop it in your CRM or other database of contacts.

FOLLOW UP with your contacts, remind them where you met, what you spoke about (briefly) and share anything you think will help you both stay in touch. It's also nice to send a thank you message to the hosts.

Write a short post about the event, what you loved about it, the venue etc. add vids, pics & share on socials and tag the host, venue and people you met.

Where appropriate maybe think about having a 1 to 1 meeting, to explore any areas you can help each other.

Take time to celebrate your win, you got through a networking event and hopefully it went well. Do this again, and start to build your network of contacts and build your business.

06 Plan Your Recovery

Write down your impressions of the venue, the event, and maybe start a scoring system. Would you plan a second visit?

Tell any business friends about it, maybe plan a return trip with them! Can you ride share (if driving)?

Ensure you take a rest after expending a lot of social “spoons” of energy. Avoid back-to-back events and ensure you rest and recharge afterwards.

Well done for navigating a tricky social situation and doing the best for your business. It's not easy, but with practice you can find “your tribe” at events and make them more like a gathering of friends!

Consistency Builds Success

Consistency in business builds your success, keep going!

- There's a LOT of networking events, and initially you may not find the ones you enjoy attending, but keep looking & going!
- Some free events attract smaller businesses avoiding the expense of paid networking. However, using free events to build your skill at networking, ensures you make the most out of paid events.



7 Signs of ND Friendly Networking Groups

Not all networking groups are going to suit your needs. However, there might be some signs ahead of your attendance that a group is going to work with your needs better than some others. Your needs may also change over time, but just be aware of the following positive signs to allow you to make the best of each opportunity.



Positive Signs

- Clear schedule, structure and any venue information communicated beforehand.
- Smaller, intimate group sizes (10–20 people).
- Venues with quiet areas or breakout spaces.
- Organizers who send agendas or event details in advance inc. guest speaker topics.
- No forced sign ups – join at your own pace.
- Inclusive language and images of diversity used in marketing and on invites (e.g., “come as you are”).
- Respectful time boundaries – communicating start and end time, which they stick to.

Not All Groups are Equal

Not all groups are run the same or even efficiently, and those running the groups may also be running another business or businesses, or be a franchise.

Just be wary of big promises being made about the level of business you might find from the group, esp. if a membership fee is discussed.

Most larger networking groups will allow free attendance for a short period so you can assess the group. Use this wisely, one visit is unlikely to make a huge difference to your business.

8 Signs of Networking Groups to Avoid

We've had experience of big, well-known networking groups to have issues as well as smaller, more local networks. However some of the really bad experiences have a lot in common no matter what size the group. Make your own list over time but the following will help you initially.

Red Flags

- No clear agenda or what to expect. Little up-front info, bad website and infrequent socials.
- Very large, chaotic crowds - some venues can make a few dozen people feel overwhelming.
- Overly sales-driven atmosphere ("pitch fest"), these are absolutely to be avoided.
- No consideration for accessibility - no quiet spaces, no breaks (if appropriate) or food intolerance accommodation if food is served.
- Organizers who dismiss or ignore your valid concerns or questions about the event.
- Events that run late or drag on without structure & have no respect for your time.

No is a Complete Sentence

If you attend an event and it's not for you then leave. It's very simple, you can leave and no one will chase after you (or if they do, then you know not to go back!)

If the follow up is overly pushy or aggressive, ignore or delete and block.

Being a good networker is also about weeding out the bad events, and not attending them. You don't need to spread bad reviews, as the event will usually flounder without any help from you. Just.Don't.Go!



9 People to Avoid at Networking Events

We've attended a lot of networking between us over the years and whilst no two events are alike, you might come across these common characters. This is a bit of fun, but these traits are to be avoided in yourself, as well as others!



The Octopus

Very touchy feely. Lots of handshakes and hugs.

Why to avoid: Physical boundaries aren't respected.



The Megaphone

Talks WAAAAAY too loudly, dominates every conversation.

Why to avoid: Noise overload and little chance to speak.



The Pitch Machine

Instantly gives you a business cards and tries to sell. (Pitch) Fork off!

Why to avoid: Zero genuine connection or empathy.



The Name Dropper

Only talks about who they know, and what they have.

Why to avoid: Shallow interactions, can feel invalidating.



The Energy Vampire

Draining, with their complaining and constant negativity

Why to avoid: Emotionally draining and unproductive.



The Vanisher

Appears and disappears mid-chat without warning.

Why to avoid: Can leave you feeling awkward or confused!

Just a bit of fun, but it might help you avoid some of these traits and be a better business networker. What other "types" have you spotted? share with us: hosts@businessoddcast.com



10 Key Takeaways and Final Words

Networking isn't about how many business cards you collect — it's about building trust and genuine connections. The key is finding a style that feels right for you, whether that's a small coffee meetup or a structured workshop, rather than forcing yourself into noisy, crowded mixers.

By preparing ahead of time, pacing yourself during events, and protecting your energy afterwards, you can make networking a positive and sustainable part of your business growth.

Seek out ND-friendly spaces or create your own supportive circle, and remember — it's always okay to leave early or say no if an event doesn't feel right for you.

Key Points

- Networking isn't about collecting contacts, it's about building comfort & trust.
- Find your style — big mixers aren't for everyone.
- Prepare, pace, and protect your energy.
- Look for ND-friendly spaces, or create your own safe circle.
- Remember: It's okay to leave early, or say no entirely.

Guide Summary

This guide has walked you through the entire networking journey, from prepping before the event, to navigating the chaos in the moment, and finally recharging and reflecting afterwards. It's packed with tips to help neurodivergent business owners approach networking in a way that feels safe, comfortable, and effective.

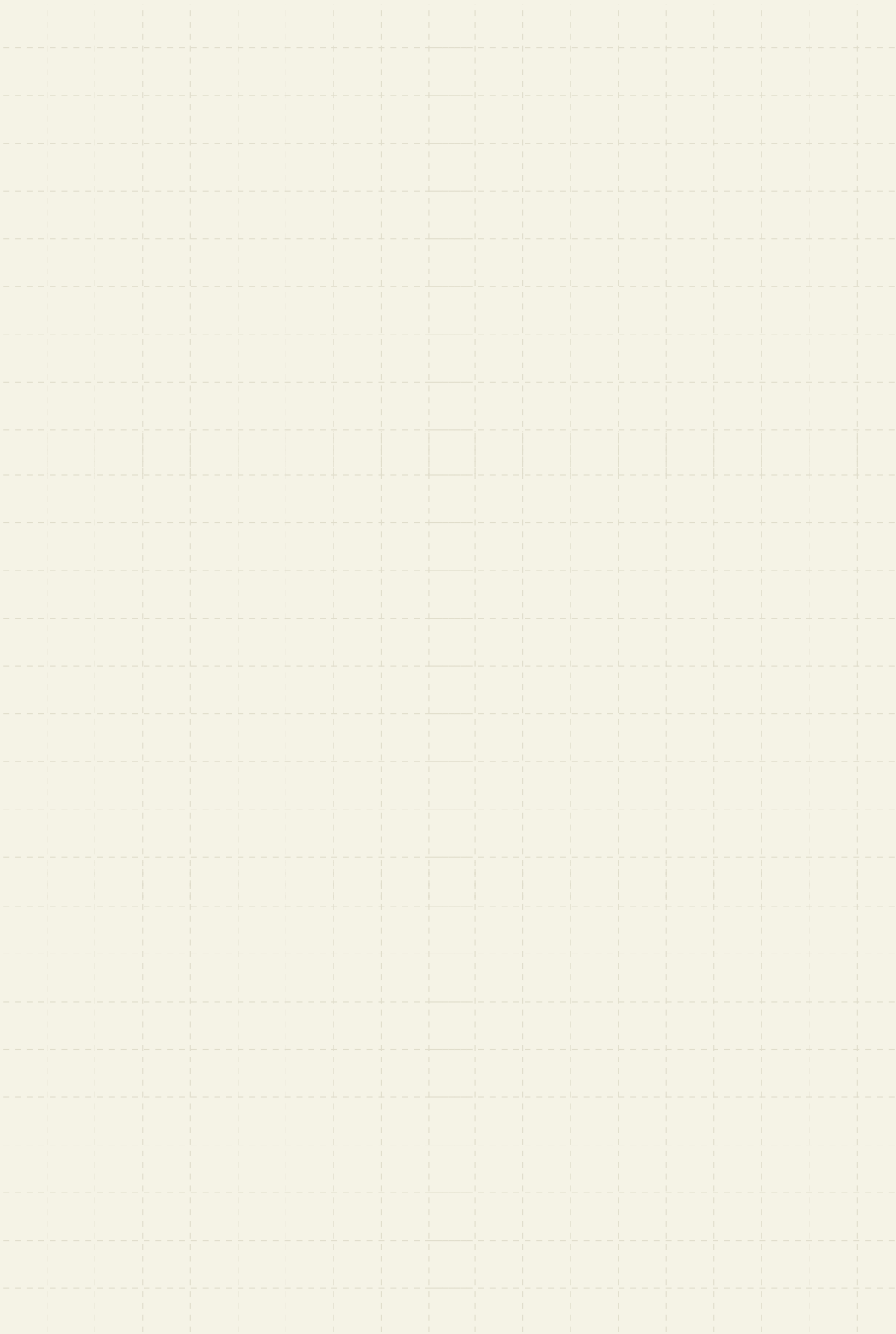
Whether you're just starting out or looking to make networking less overwhelming, these ideas are here to help you grow your business while staying true to yourself.

Final Words

We hope these strategies give you the confidence to approach networking with less stress and more purpose. Remember, there's no "right" way to network — only what works best for you. Make these tips your own, and keep building connections that support both you and your business. Now go out there, show up as yourself, and most importantly be kind to your energy!

Join us for more help, guidance and stories from the front line of ND business everyweek at the [BusinessOddcast.com](https://businessoddcast.com) - we release a new podcast each week, if you want to comment or be a guest email: hosts@businessoddcast.com







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