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## ON NETWORKING GROUPS ( PART FOUR )

What is a leads group? Leads groups seem to be the most popular form of networking judging that comment by the fact that there are more leads groups in existence that have been around for a long time than most other types of groups.

Leads groups are often referred to as closed groups. This means that there can only be one type of a business represented in a group. Lets say that I am a web designer. In a closed group I would be the only web designer represented in the group. Other web designers would be allowed to visit, but if they wanted to join the organization they would have to find a group that did not have a web designer. If there was no opening in an existing group for a web designer, the person would have to go on a waiting list until an opening became available, or a new group was formed.

Most leads groups meet once a week. There are some that only meet once a month. Leads groups offer something that a lot of people need. Structure and discipline. What do I mean by this?

**Structure** - In a leads group you do not have to be a master net worker. As a matter of fact, you can be a shy person and still have success in a leads group. Most leads groups allow a given amount of time to tell other members about your business. This usually ranges from one to five minutes. In this allotted amount of time you can go into great detail about your business including describing what type of leads you are looking for. The format is usually accomplished by sitting around a large table, and a leader moderates the time and asks questions. The meetings are generally held early in the morning or at lunchtime.

**Discipline** - In a leads group you are expected to show up for the meetings. Theoretically, if a leads group had only 15 members and several people did not show up, it would be difficult to have a reasonable meeting. To insure against this happening most groups require that you assign a substitute when you can not attend. This substitute should be a person in the same industry as you so that the balance of the group is not affected. In this situation, if you have a tendency to miss a lot of meetings, it would not be good to join a leads group. If you miss a lot of meetings without a sub, you will be ejected from the group.

**The upside?** In a leads group you will get to know people very well over time and get an idea of their abilities to fulfill the needs of a referral. This is good if you do not have time during the week to meet with people one-on-one in order to get to know them. A dedicated group will provide you with a steady stream of leads that you can utilize to expand your business.

**The downside?** Well, sometimes the leads become a paramount obligation and people feel pressured to pass them. If they are passing leads that are just names and numbers without a true expressed need, the leads generally lead you nowhere. Another issue is a member of the group whose quality of product or service does not meet the standards that you would want to refer to someone. It is difficult to pass a solid qualified lead to someone who will not provide the kind of service that you would expect them to.

There are also a few groups in existence that are in essence leads groups. They allow freedom to go to any meeting you wish as long as you are a member. The format is the same, seated at a table, and there is usually a time limit. The problem with these groups is that people wander in and out and without a lot of time to talk individually, you still have to set appointments outside of the group to really get to know someone. Without the discipline, the freeform leads group usually does not last for a long period of time. Often these groups open and close with great regularity leaving the members to search for another meeting to attend.

In closing, I would like to add that there is no wrong or right group to belong to. Visit groups and you will find the ones that are right for you. It is often beneficial to belong to three types of groups to get the most out of your networking efforts.

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