

How Networking Could Save Your Life

GOING BEYOND COMPETITION TO COOPERATION

By Chuck "The DJ" Lehnhard

I have been a full time DJ for 28 years; longer if you count my first DJ job in 1969. I am here to tell you that there was no way could I have survived this long without the help of other DJs.

Networking. It is a key word in our industry and many know how important it is to network and to get in good with the local venues, photographers, florists and caterers, just to name a few. They are great and very important for your livelihood. But in my book, when it comes right down to it, no other group is as important in networking and building relationships than your local competitors: the DJs around the corner from you.

Getting to know DJs from around the world is also important and I will get back to that, but right now let's focus on the local companies, the ones in your area that you compete with day to day.

I have talked to many DJs who tell me that they don't network or

their names and add them to your networking list.

Make a point of getting a card from the local DJs you see at hotels or events around town. Don't bother them during their event, just get a quick card and follow up later. Look them up on Facebook, Yelp, LinkedIn or the Internet. Is there a local ADJA chapter where you live? Join. It doesn't matter where you find them, but it does matter that you make a connection. Don't just email or call them once. Keep trying; it will pay off.

I could share a zillion stories, but instead I will try and make my point with just a couple, and those in their short versions:

It was a dark and stormy night. Rain pouring down in the dead of December. Trees are falling, roads are washing out, truly scary stuff! I made it to my event, a company Holiday party. But I had been so stressed out about the situation that I forgot to pack my CDs! Driving back home through all of that and hoping I could make it back in time, or at all, worried me. I made a call to my DJ bud Phil. He was available to drive to my house, get my CD case and bring it to me as I set up.

Or the time that I plugged into a drop box at a hotel, fired up my amp rack and low and behold, they gave me 220 and my amps fried. I called another DJ bud and he had his wife bring me a new amp to use.

Ever show up to an event when, out of the blue, they tell you that they need three extra mics, or want to hook up a musician to your system? Make a call and one of the DJs in your circle can bring you that extra gear you might not have in your vehicle. Next time, it might be you returning the favor.

There are other stories I could share to make my point, and yes, even though the situations involved could have been prevented by me that is not the point. The point is, that for whatever reason I had a problem at an event, a local DJ with who I networked with helped me out. I am willing to bet that very few DJs have ever had 100% of their events go off without a hitch. Many times I bet you hope and pray to make it through an event, when all that stress could have been avoided by calling a DJ friend and having them bring you what you needed. You can never have too many DJ friends.

When I moved from California to Maui, I made a post on the ProDJ.com site asking if there were any Maui DJs there that could give me some insight. DJ SkinnyGuy, a.k.a. Randy Bermudez, got back to me and helped me with any questions I had. When I got to Maui, he even offered to lend me gear for

my first event if my gear did not arrive in time. One time he was willing to drive half way around the island because I needed a power cord. Networking.

When you start approaching others, bear in mind that it sometimes takes a long time to get people to come around to the advantages of networking. When I was on Maui it took DJ Alan almost two years to finally return my calls, emails and posts to him! But once he did, we became close friends and we still talk at least twice a week even though I moved back to California.

Let's talk about that move. After being on Maui for eight years, my wife and I decided to move back to the mainland. At 55, thinking about re-starting my DJ business wasn't an overly appealing idea. The



get to know the other DJs in their area because they are competition; the "enemy," the ones to be put out of business. To me this seems short-sighted because nowhere else will you have a stronger support system, back-up plan or referral base than with your fellow DJs.

I do understand not everyone will get along with everyone, and for every five DJs you connect with, there might be ten you don't. But the ones that you do hit it off with will be there for you, and hopefully you for them.

It may take a concerted effort on your part. Try hosting a pizza night at your office, or a golf day, or a "Game Day" get-together in your man cave. You can even just start with one other DJ. Go have lunch together and see if he or she networks with other DJs, and if so, get

remedy? Call up Phil Trau, one of the DJs that I know in the area I was moving to, and ask him if he would hire me as one of his DJs. Done deal. We were on a plane. Networking.

Jump back to Maui for a second. What about all those DJs that I have met over the years at the Mobile Beat convention, or on websites or on Facebook that I became friends with? DJing on Maui I did 95% destination events. Brides and grooms from all over the world would come to get "Maui'd" Because of my prior networking sometimes I would contact a DJ in another state and tell them I am doing a wedding for a bride from "wherever" and ask if there were any local songs or styles I should know about to better entertain my clients. On the flip side, I can't tell you the number of DJs that contacted me asking about Hawaiian music for a Luau party they were doing, or a good place to get some aloha wear for the event.

Some examples: Being from California, I used to think "beach music" was The Beach Boys, Jan & Dean and so on. Who knew that in the Carolinas they have their own type of "beach music" that has nothing to do with The Beach Boys? Called my friend DJ Art in North Carolina and I learned all I needed to know. Not just from some list on the internet but from a DJ who is playing it and knows what works on the dance floor.

The song "Home For A Rest" by Spirit of the West was huge in Canada and all I had to do was send an e-mail to Patrick Smiley up there asking what songs rocked his local weddings. "Hey, Naveen Sharma, I have an Indian wedding coming up where they want some Bollywood music; got an idea?" I got a \$100 tip that night. Networking.

Could I have learned some of these things on my own? Just

go by some Top 40 music list online? Sure, but isn't it much better to be able to talk to other DJs who are playing this stuff and to find out what is working on the dance floor at their events? Real-world experience.

Want to learn a new way to do something or a new twist on something that you already know? Now that you have those DJ

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friends, go out with them to their event or bring one with you to your event. Work together. Don't even make it a money thing, you shadow him, he shadows you and it all balances out. Get a new hint and share. Do not be afraid to share it make us all better and stronger. It raises that "bar" we all talk about just a bit more.

Is any of this ground-breaking, earth shattering, OMG-new? No, networking has been around for a long time, but it is something that we need to be reminded of, and it needs to be worked on. In this economically challenging time, it is more important than ever.

Building a network of DJs will not only help you to become a better DJ, but with all the combined knowledge, will make you more valuable to your clients. And it might even save your next event, which in our world, is like saving your life. **MB**



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