

# Network like its

# 1995



*DIGITAL NETWORKING IS NO SUBSTITUTE FOR THE REAL FACE-TO-FACE DEAL. SARAH SPARKS HAS PROOF THAT REAL WORLD NETWORKING STILL HAS AN IMPORTANCE PLACE IN THE MODERN BUSINESS LANDSCAPE.*

**I**n an age where social media has infiltrated society, cyber networking through LinkedIn has become the norm. The latest global membership figures show that there are 332 million people on the global networking platform, including over a million Kiwis.

So why join a business association? Where is the value-add in this digital day and age?

Offshore research shows that people pay their membership for a host of advantages like:

- Networking opportunities that speed up integration into the community.
- Political participation if specific issues affect the business owners.
- Social advantages through the opportunity to attend events and meet peers.
- Improved business climate through uniting in the community and sharing resources.

Is this true in the New Zealand business community context?

The answers from members of the French New Zealand Chamber of Commerce and Industry are varied, yet share a similar sentiment.

Very active in the business community, FNZCCI holds numerous events throughout the year ranging from celebrations like Bastille Day and Beaujolais Nouveau, through to entrepreneur seminars, social pétanque and networking events. Its primary purpose is to promote business ties between New Zealand, France and the French Pacific Territories

Dominique Colombie, owner of Paneton Bakery, who's been a member for two decades, says he joined "to extend and strengthen our ties with the French business community". In his mind, it's all about the quality of networking and learning from shared experiences.

Whereas another longstanding member for 13 years,

Benoît Marcenac, MD of Sofrana Unilines believes the reason his company joined was "mainly as a social responsibility." Personally he values belonging to a community with a similar interest.

Thibault Beaujot, forecast and promotions manager at Reckitt Benckiser, a member for only a few months, seized the valuable learning opportunity to "create a network and get advice from other French citizens living and doing business in New Zealand".

The importance of *networking* face to face stood out as the overwhelming reason to join the organisation. It remains a fundamental part of the modern business landscape.

Top US academic Deborah Mills-Scofield, agrees. The Brown University board member and *Harvard Business Review* blogger says that "networking has enabled our survival for the last 2000 years". It needs to be cultivated and treated well, she advises, because networks promote communication and spread knowledge.

So effective business associations grow networks. It's obvious. But why?

According to international social science research by Professor Brian Uzzi at the Kellogg School of Management, most people choose to interact with others based on three strategies:

- They identify people in their network often with the same qualities that they have.
- They look for others who share those qualities.
- They find those new people through people they already know.

Even with over 500 connections on his LinkedIn profile, Thibault appreciates the benefits of connecting through shared experiences and social activities at FNZCCI.

"I definitely would recommend others to join, especially the young generation or newbies in New Zealand." **NZB**