

What Dr. Ivan Misner thinks of Marketing and how it works for him...

Amanda

The reason why I am doing this interview is I would like to help some of my clients and other business owners understand a little bit about marketing. A lot of people I have met in business are really unsure about marketing and always comment on "it doesn't work" or "it's too expensive" and things like that and I just thought it would be a good way to interview successful people in business who have been there and done it really.

I just wanted to start off by saying Thank you very much for agreeing to the interview today. I'm quite chuffed that you said yes you would do it.

Most people know that you are the founder of BNI and the chairman of BNI, could you tell me a little bit more about yourself.

Dr. Ivan Misner

Well I grew up in Southern California, a fairly humble lower middle class neighbourhood. I put myself through school with some scholarships and grants and actually went to local community college here in Southern California, then to a state University and finally finished my education at a private University USC, where I did my Masters and Doctorate.

Originally you know, it's funny that you're doing this for business owners and I think it is of value for them to know I thought I was going to go in multiple different directions before I ended up landing where I landed.

First I was going to be a Lawyer and even applied to Law School and was accepted. At the last minute, I decided I really didn't want to be a Lawyer and to this day, I can't tell you why I decided I didn't want to go into Law School, but I made that decision and I never looked back and I was fine with that decision.

And then I thought I'd work for the government and actually that ten minutes, or maybe two years I worked for the government and found that I absolutely could not work for the government. The level of incompetence and bureaucracy were far beyond my powers to control myself. I mean it was just crazy working for the government.

So I started my own businesses. Here is something virtually no one knows about me, I actually owned a trucking company for a while... a big eighteen wheeler, you know I can't drive a truck! I barely know the front end from the back end. But I owned the business. I had a partner who understood, he could drive. Then I ran a consulting company and it was from the consulting company that led me to BNI, trying to get referrals for my consulting company is what started me off.

Amanda

That was my next question. You wrote a book called "Givers Gain", and I am a member of BNI myself so, you know, I do have a copy of it and you know, the next question was why did you start BNI?

Dr. Ivan Misner

Well I'd like to tell you I had this vision of International business, but the truth is I needed some referrals for my Consulting Practice and I put together people I trusted and they trusted me and we agreed to help each other. At this point I had a very successful Consulting Practice. I did this sort of meandering direction to find out what I really wanted to do and landed on this consulting and I really enjoyed it.

I had a number of clients and was doing really well. I lost a big client during a previous recession. I started up BNI as a way of replacing that business with referrals and some one came to that first group after a month or two, because from the beginning we only allowed one person per profession and she said "Yes, I could get a ton of business out of this, would you help me open up my own group because I cant join this group because you have got some one?". I said, "You know what this isn't what I do, I'm a business consultant". Well this is sort of consulting. It's helping me to start up a group that would help me in business, and OK, close enough so I did it, and that led to two more which led to two more and we ended up opening 20 groups in the first year by accident and it was really at that point that I realised I had struck a chord and I had a little bit of an epiphany there and I think this is of value to business people. When you stumble over something that is a product or service that you really find strikes a positive chord with business people, run with it!

And that's what I did with BNI, I ran with it and continued to do my consulting business for a couple of years and finally I had to sell my consulting practice because BNI just took over.

Amanda

Took over the world in fact!

Dr. Ivan Misner

Yes, we now have more than 6,000 chapters in about 50 countries all over the world.

Amanda

That's fantastic, and where was the first chapter?

Dr. Ivan Misner

Southern California, Arcadia California. And that chapter still operates today and we still have two firsts who are members still not counting myself, and we have a 4th member who is on the Board of Advisor's. So there is still 4 of us from the original 12 who are still active in the organisation.

Amanda

That's great. How did you feel about marketing when you first started up your companies? Was it something you could just run with or were you not sure about it when you started?

Dr. Ivan Misner

Definitely not sure about it.

My bachelor's degree was in Political Science, my Masters and Doctorate where in Organisational Behaviour. I had very little marketing experience until I went to work for a Transportation company in Southern California and one day the President called me in and said "*Today we are going to fire the purchasing agent, what do you know about purchasing*".

I said "I don't know anything about purchasing and he said well you better start reading up because we are going to fire the purchasing agent and I'm going to make you the intern purchasing agent for the company" I was like OK great. And no joke, 30 days later he called me in said "what do you know about marketing?" I said "No, don't do this to me". He said; "Yes, I am going to fire the Manger of Marketing services today and I am going to fire the Director of Marketing..." and he said that "I am going to take over the Director of Marketing position on an intern basis. I need you to take over the Manager of Marketing Services, so you better read up."

So, my marketing experience was trial by fire and reading. I just started reading books on marketing and learnt as I went and it was that experience at that Transportation Company that gave me enough knowledge to really go out and do a little bit of marketing on my own when I went out as a business consultant. So I don't have a lot of formal education and training in marketing.

Amanda

I think it is one of the jobs that is a hands on job. It's one of those things you have to try and test things all the time because every company is different. So, where would you start when it comes to marketing a company?

Dr. Ivan Misner

Well I think you have you assess the company because you said it, different techniques apply to different companies. You know not all companies are the same. For example, when I was a Management Consultant there were just certain things that didn't work. Traditional advertising did not work as a Business Consultant. It just didn't work. Nobody hired a Management Consultant off of an Ad. I spent a lot of money doing brochures and marketing materials. They were almost a completely waste of time and money.

I say almost because to some extent it gave me at least a marginal level of credibility when I was talking to people that I had this brochure. But the truth is I never made a sale off of a brochure and I never made a sale off of an advertisement. What happened very quickly was certain businesses advertising and traditional forms of marketing are just not applicable. In other forms of businesses they are, I mean I have run and do own businesses that are know by a lot of BNI members I own a number of companies. I am a silent partner in a number of and a not so silent partner in others.

I'm a senior partner in the Referral Institute, which is a known franchise company. I don't usually talk about these other businesses that I own because sometimes it defuses one's credibility, but in talking about marketing I want to give examples of other businesses that marketing applies. I have, for more than a decade owned a travel agency. Now that's traditional marketing, you'd better be in the phone book you better do some advertising. That's a more traditional kind of business. So I learnt that different businesses require different forms of marketing.

BNI certainly is traditional marketing doesn't necessarily work, although traditional Social Media does.

We may get into other Social Media stuff as we go along. Social Media, I think applies to almost all businesses. It's pretty effective.

Amanda

[Yes it's the next biggest thing, or it is the biggest thing at the moment. So, getting your name and your brand out there is very important to all businesses, so what would your top marketing tip be?](#)

Dr. Ivan Misner

Well I think it really is about building the brand. Either the brand of the business or the brand of the individual, depending on the kind of business that you're in and so it's name recognition. That's the biggest challenge, especially for small companies. But we live in an age now where small companies literally have a global reach with Facebook and Twitter and Blogs and the kind of Social Media that's available, that wasn't available when I started.

You know I told somebody here, a young 20 something here, last week I said "*Do you know what the 2nd biggest line item budget my company was 20 years ago*". She said, "*I don't know*" she started naming off stuff. I said "*No. It was telephones; telephones were the second biggest cost for me in a company twenty years ago*". It was outrageously expensive! Telephones and 800 numbers ate up a huge part of my budget and making long distance calls... Oh my goodness, it was really expensive.

Now, it's probably 1% of my budget, you know. It's nothing out there, and that's indicative of the change in technology and the change in technology allows you to build your brand, and so I think the biggest marketing tip I would give is learn how to use the technology to build your name recognition.

For me it was about writing and that's where it is very important what I'm going to say. It's not the same for everybody, because everybody's business is a little different and their skill sets are different. So you can take my advice and it won't apply to you because maybe you have a different skill set and you're in a different business, but for me it was writing.

If I could get my name out there, and I started doing this before the Social Media, before Internet. It was print media. So I was trying to get in news papers, magazines and I would write articles. Now it's much, much easier. It's so easy to build your name as a brand. The problem you have is all the white noise that's out there, because there is so many people out there doing it you have to be able to stand out.

So for me the top marketing tip would be write, write, write. Become an expert in your field so people want to follow you. When they follow you, they are more likely to do business with you.

Amanda

[It's a great tip! We are always telling people they should be blogging. The more you blog and the more you put yourself in front of people giving them the answers that they want the better really, because they know that you are the person to come to when they are in trouble or need any help.](#)

Dr. Ivan Misner

That's very true and blogging, I went kicking and screaming into blogging because you know I don't journal really that much and so I thought you know, I had to do something a couple of times a week there is just no way, but I find that it has been very effective. If you go to Google and you type in "Business Networking", which is a phrase I try to dominate, you're going to see BNI. I just now did it, 69 million 600 thousand hits. BNI is number 1 on the non-advertised, because you know there is advertisements that they put in front of you. But in the non-advertisements BNI is number one and my blog Business Networking with Dr. Ivan Misner is like number 5 or 6. That took years to be able to do, you know be out there punching away to have two spots on the front page.

Amanda

I've read your latest blog which is "Talk to someone, not about someone" and my next question was going to be; what do you think of Social Media as a marketing tool? And has it helped you to date?

Dr. Ivan Misner

Yes it is. So let's talk about really the foundations of what it is I teach, because I think the foundation of what I teach applies both online and off line and face-to-face. The foundation of what I try to teach people is what I call the "VCP Process" of networking.

VCP it stands for Visibility, Credibility, and Profitability. It's a chronological process. You have to go from one to the other. It starts with visibility, people know who you are and what you do and then you go to credibility where people know who you are and what you do and they know you're good at it. And from that then they go to profitability where people know who you are and what you do, they know your good at it and they are willing to pass you business on an on going reciprocal basis.

Where networking goes bad, is where people try to jump ahead in that process. Whether you're talking about face-to-face or Social Media. They meet you online and face-to-face and they say "*Hi Amanda, I'm Ivan, we should be doing business or it would be great if you could refer business to me.*" and there is no relationship. They try to jump over visibility they try to jump over credibility and try to get right to profitability.

I call this premature solicitation, and you don't want to say that fast. It happens on line worse than face-to-face. Premature solicitation happens on line, but it happens at light speed. People try to jump ahead in the relationship process way before it's time in the relationship to asking for referrals. So I think understanding the VCP Process is important to understand how to build your business either online or face-to-face.

Amanda

It's a good process because you do have a lot of people trying to link in with you or Tweet with you to find out who is with in your network, and obviously in my case I wouldn't be comfortable if I haven't met them face-to-face first off because it's my reputation if things go bad in that case.

Dr. Ivan Misner

That's a great point that you bring up there, because sometimes I would be willing to try somebody out myself, you know I would read about them or something may happen where I would try somebody. But I will never refer someone to somebody I have never used or somebody I don't know.

I'm willing to refer people to people I haven't used, if I know other people have used them. But the point I'm trying to make is, I'm willing to try somebody I have never used, even if they weren't referred to me, you know I might try them out if I met them somewhere. I might try them out, but I would never refer somebody to them and that's really interesting.

I am willing to risk myself but I am not willing to risk my reputation with somebody else. And I think people had some thought and so they are asking people to give referrals or to pass referrals to them when there is no relationship, you know there's a snowballs chance in hell for somebody I don't know.

Amanda

Exactly! You are also known as the "*Father of modern networking*" aren't you, and relationships are key to all businesses.

Dr. Ivan Misner.

I'm just glad they are not calling me the "*Grandfather of modern networking*".

Amanda

I'm not going to say anything, but you know... Not yet. But there is always time isn't there.

What I was going to ask you was... Relationships are key to all businesses and they are important whether you are in business or whether it's just general life. What is your top tip to dealing with people in business?

Dr. Ivan Misner

Relationships... It's important to maintain those relationships and so one of the things I recommend is maintaining "Touch Points". Touch points are where you just stay in contact with people on a regular basis.

There are a lot of ways to maintaining touch points, much easier today than in the past, Social Media being one of them, Email, Facebook, just dropping a message on some body's wall on Facebook or Twitter.

A personal hand written note, nothing is more effective than a personal hand written note, as long as you do it. You know, I tell people personal hand written notes are probably the best or services, there are actually services like, there is a company called Send Out Cards, which would send personalised cards in the mail for you... Great service and that I am more likely to do than a hand written note, because my hand writing is so bad. I just don't do it so I tell people hand written notes are best, but they are no good if you don't do it.

So you have got to find other ways to do it to stay connected, so touch points, stay in touch with them as much as you possibly can, because when you stay top of mind they will remember you when it comes time to possibly give you a call.

Amanda

Yes, you are exactly right. Probably the most important thing to a company as well is retaining customers or clients. Have you got any great ways apart from, the hand written notes or the contact, to keep hold of your clients?

Dr. Ivan Misner

Well, first and foremost is to always do a good job. Customer service is probably one of the best ways to keep a client or customer, if you don't do a good job; they are going to leave you. But sometimes you can do a good job and they will still leave you if you are not top of mind.

Someone said to me recently "*a client is more likely to fire a vendor than they are a friend*" and so if you can maintain a professional friendship with people and do a good job. They go hand in hand. It doesn't matter how good your friendship is, if you don't do a good job they are not going to keep you. But if you do a good job and maintain the friendship people are often at times willing to actually spend a little bit more money with somebody to maintain the relationship because they can trust them and they know they will do a good job.

So doing a good job and staying in touch, those are two important things.

Amanda

Definitely! Have you got any tips on getting news clients because people are always asking me, "*How do I get more clients through the door?*" "*How do I get more awareness of the company?*".

Obviously getting more awareness of the company is completely different from getting a new client to sign up with you. But have you got any tips about getting new customers in the first place?

Dr. Ivan Misner

To me, it's all about referrals. BNI is an example of a company that is built virtually 100% on referrals. My consulting business was built on 100% referrals and so referrals are the key. In order to get referrals you have to understand a few things, one is networking is more about farming than it is about hunting. It's about cultivating relationships with people over a long term period. Also you have to kind of have the right frame of mind when you are going out to network.

I did a presentation in London a year ago and there were about 500 people in the audience, I asked everyone. I said "*How many of you here are hoping today to possibly sell something? Raise your hand if you know, you might be able to sell something*" and almost everybody raised their hand, I said "*OK great*". "*How many of you are here today, wanting to buy something, raise your hand?*" and nobody raised their hand. Not a single person.

That is the networking disconnect. What I call the networking disconnect. People show up at networking events hoping to sell something, but nobody is there hoping to buy something. And so one of the most important things I can tell people in terms of building their business in my expertise is in referrals and so that is my focus. You have got to show up to networking events looking to make connections to build relationships and those relationships turn into referrals, because networking is truly more about farming than it is about hunting and if you understand what I call the "Time Confidence Curve" you can apply this effectively.

The Time Confidence Curve basically says that it takes a certain amount of time before people have confidence in your ability to provide a good quality product or service and that that time confidence curve varies depending on what type of profession you are in. A florist might have a small time confidence curve but a financial planner who is investing in your retirement and income has an extremely long time confidence curve and so be patient and do a number of techniques and things necessary to build those relationships to get/generate the referrals.

Amanda

Yes. I think the biggest thing that BNI has taught me whilst being there for 3 years is to go along to networking events to actually help other people, you know... Have in mind who you could refer onto them, as long as you trust them and that kind of thing.

Dr. Ivan Misner

But isn't that counter intuitive? That's counter intuitive. That is where people don't get networking, it's completely counter intuitive. Wait a minute; I am going there to help somebody else? No, no, no, I want to get business.

Well the truth is the best way to get business is to help somebody else. If it's really about building relationships I mean we have to start with that and you said it, it's about building relationships. I think most people agree it's about building relationships, so, if it's about building relationships so lets take this on a personal relationship basis and apply it to business. First of all, how long does it take to build a close relationship with somebody? A month? Probably not. Think about your best friends. I'm guessing 6 months or a year, right? So, it's going to take time. That's the first thing.

The second thing is, what is the best way to build a relationship? If you are all about you and everything is about you it's hard to build a friendship with somebody, unless, you know, it's somebody that just worships you and that doesn't tend to last long. So, relationships are give and take and the best way to start a relationship is to give to the relationship. Help somebody in some way.

It's no different in a business relationship. If you can support somebody and help somebody, you move through the time confidence curve faster because you have been there to help somebody and support somebody and that is where it is counter intuitive. Because people show up, that's where the networking disconnect happens. They show up to get business but not to help people and yet the best way to get business is to help people. Make sense?

Amanda

Yes completely. I meet some people who don't get BNI at all. They don't get the whole ethos behind it, the "Givers gain". You know, if I give you business, hopefully you will give me business in return and it's not something that we want instantly it's something we build relationships over, as you say, 3 months, 6 months... To build that trust to make sure we can refer each other with confidence, which is key I think. You can't refer somebody first time around if you don't know if they can do that job, which I think is very important.

Motivation is quite an important thing when you run your own business. You have to have drive to keep going and you also have ups and downs that come and go so, have you got a quote or a tip that you could share for business owners?

Dr. Ivan Misner

I think you have got to be motivated; you have got to be passionate. It's the one characteristic that I see that really applies to almost all successful people. I did a book called "Masters of Success" and I ask people what were some of the key traits of successful people? They would say, system and dealing with adversity and passion of course was one, vision, goal setting.

All these things came up and different people had a different level of success in some of those areas. Some were real visionaries, some were more about systems. The one piece of glue that kind of held it all together was passion and motivation and the commitment to working hard.

The secret to success without working hard is still a secret. I don't know what it is, you know, it takes a lot of hard work, so you have got to be really committed to making that happen. I think that is the one thing that ties together all of the successful people that I have met. They have been doing motivation with a bit

of passion involved; they do it not all the time. Everybody gets down, you know, we all do... I certainly do. I think part of what helps me get through difficult times is a whole set of ideas about balance.

I tell business people that I know the secret about balance, tell me the secret about balance, here's the secret to balance. Forget about it, it will never happen. If you are a business person you are never going to have balance in your life your life is going to be crazy out of balance. But you can create harmony in your life and that's more than semantics and it is some good news to those people who trying to have some kind of balance.

Balance assumes that your life is perfectly in equilibrium and that you're spending just the same amount of time and the right amount of time with your family as you are with your office and spiritual life as you are with health and fitness and the truth is nobody can do that consistently. It's just not realistic. So I try to give people a pass and say hey you know it's OK, you're not going to be in balance, but you can create harmony.

You know, harmony means you are going to be way out of balance this week, so next week you better be out of balance in the other things in your life. So, that you can create a harmonious life as opposed to a balanced week. For example I travel, I travel a lot. I am on the road all the time and yet you know, I talk to my kids all the time about hey you know do you think I am around much and they are like yes you are around all the time. Yeah I am on the road a lot? Yes, but when your here your like really here.

So that's part of the, and I've got a whole more on harmony and balance. But I think in order to maintain motivation which was your original question; you have to have some sense of harmony if not balance in order to do that.

Amanda

I like that. Harmony instead of the work/life balance, because I think you are always striving or trying to have that work life balance and you are right. It's not realistic because business is up and down. Sometimes you can't keep on top of one or the other, so I like the fact that you have said the harmony thing.

Dr. Ivan Misner.

Let me give you one technique for your listeners for maintaining harmony. There's a bunch of stuff, I've written about this. Go to my blog businessnetworking.com and type in harmony an article, an old article I wrote about. So here is a technique I use. It's very simple; I mean it's so simple.

Its three words. **Be Here Now.** Where ever you are, be there! So, when I am at home I am not thinking about the work I have to be going through and when I am at the office I am not thinking about the time I didn't spend with my son last night, OK?

Where ever you are, be there! So when I am at home, I am at HOME and if my head is still at the office then my head's not here. That frees me up, that kind of mental compartmentalisation frees me up to truly be present, so that when I'm at the office I'm not obsessing over what I should be doing at home and when I'm at home I'm not obsessing over what needs to be done at the office.

Be, Here, Now. Where ever you are, be fully present in that time and in that moment with those people. And you will find that that is a great way to create harmony and nobody is perfect at this, but the better you can get at it, the more effective it will be for you. It has certainly been a technique that works for me. By the way a lot of the things I talk about are simple they are just not easy.

Link to the Harmony article: <http://businessnetworking.com/the-secret-to-balance/>

Amanda

Yes. It is just trying to keep on top of it isn't it.

Dr. Ivan Misner

Yes, if it were easy everybody would do it. And I talk to people; they say "Yeah that makes sense". You know, it's easy, well you know it's not easy. It maybe simple but it's not easy, applying it consistently that's where it gets really difficult.

Amanda

It's hard work. If you could start all over again would you change anything, would you do anything differently?

Dr. Ivan Misner

I don't know if you have, in Europe the television show "Myth Busters", have you ever seen that show? He's got a great phrase on that TV show "*I reject your reality and substitute my own.*" I love that phrase I reject your reality, and substitute my own.

So I reject your question and substitute my own. The reason for that is I can't start all over. It's a question that is an intellectual exercise I don't think does justice to what is possible so, I can't start all over again. I'd tell you that I can't think of anything in my life that I would do differently with the information I had at the time.

People are at a cross road in their life when they go to I could do A or I could do B. I know A is right and B is wrong, but B feels better I'm going to do it. Then they can look back and say "*Yes, I knew that was the wrong thing to do and I did it*", and there are no big things in my life where I did that.

You know, I made mistakes, oh good grief, I've made monumental mistakes, but the mistakes were made with the proper intentions. That is I looked at A and I looked at B and I thought A was the proper direction, and interestingly enough, generally speaking neither A nor B are the right direction it was C, which I didn't see at the time. It was not in my vision at the time. So I think the important thing for your listeners to understand is...

If you are worried about whether you are going to make mistakes in business, don't be! You will, it's inevitable. What you have to understand is you can't do it all over again. But what you can do is learn from that and not do it again. So what I try to do is not think about what I could if I do it over again, but how, not to do it again. How not to repeat the same mistakes and I have to tell you it's a journey not a destination.

There are so many variations on the same mistake that when you're looking at it and you don't think it's the same mistake. And then in hindsight you know, the whole idea of hindsight being 20/20 is a beautiful thing because in the insight sometimes you do make the same mistake again only a different variation, and so the more you can avoid that the better. But no, I wouldn't do things different with the same information. If I had different information I would do things differently but that's where experience comes in, doesn't it?

Amanda

Yes, it does and one thing I have learnt with the various coaching techniques I have picked up over the last few years is change the word failure for feedback, because you know it is exactly what you said. The more feedback that you get, you know how not to do it in the future.

Fantastic, well I have just got a final question, which is... What makes you laugh and what makes you smile?

Dr. Ivan Misner

That's a good question. I like that a lot. What makes me laugh? Well my kids make me smile; there is no doubt about that and my wife. Spending time with my family is important to me.

What makes me laugh, I think a small intimate group of people who are close friends, sitting around a table any where in the world with a glass of wine, talking that makes me laugh most. Because the dialogue the conversation and you know, it's funny because you walk away from moments like that and it's not necessarily anything dramatic that happened or any epiphany that took place, but it was just a good time with good friends. You know that you have had a good time when you walk away from it and your cheeks hurt from laughing so much and smiling so much and it was a good evening.

So I would say a good conversation, over a great bottle of wine with really good friends make me laugh.

Amanda

Brilliant, cool. Thank you very much for a great interview. I hope you have a fantastic day... Because it's around about half ten in the morning where you are, isn't it?

Dr. Ivan Misner

Yes, sure, and if you don't mind me wrapping up with one last comment. I think the most important thing I have learnt over the last almost three decades now, we are one of the world's largest networking organisations, and we are going on our 27th year. Is that it's not what you know, or who you know, it's how well you know each other that really counts.

It's all about going deep and building relationships with other business professionals. If your network is a mile wide and an inch deep it will never be sound, it will never be solid. Your network needs to be both wide and deep in places.

You need to have deep relationships, professional relationships with people in order to generate a strong referral basis and so it's not all about that visibility it's really about that credibility moving to profitability that will build a long term business and that is NOT a get rich quick scheme.

What I teach is along term successful way of building your business through relationships.

So thank you Amanda, I appreciate the interview.

Amanda

Thank you I appreciate it and have a fantastic day!

Dr. Ivan Misner

Take care.

Amanda

See you later, goodbye.