

OVER the years, you may have collected hundreds of business cards. Contact information is fundamental to networking and business communications. When you receive a business card, take time to make sure it ends up somewhere where you can find the information when you need it.

Don't let unprocessed business cards pile up. By organising your business cards, you will be able to find people quicker, which leads to more sales and more money.

Type them in, or file them at least once per week before you forget who you met and why. Follow up promptly if you promised something or if someone sounded interested.

If you get a lot of business cards, use computer software to manage them. There are business card scanners which actually read a business card and pick out the information on it and save you a lot of manual data entry.

Here are some ideas on how to organise your business cards.

STEPS

1 Look at the business card as soon as you receive it. Reading the business card is a good way to remember someone's name and connect it with their face. The person's

title is usually printed on a business card, too, meaning that you have one more clue about who they are and what they do.

2 Have a place to put business cards that you receive. If you carry a notebook or bag with you to meetings, set aside a place in it for your cards. Or, use the second pocket on your own business card carrier to collect cards you receive.

3 Organise contact information on your computer. When you return from a business lunch, trade show or meeting, immediately put the business cards you received in a safe place, such as a desk drawer or somewhere out of the reach of other people. When you have time, grab all the business cards that have piled up in your desk drawer, and type all the information into Outlook, Excel,



Access, or Word.

4 Use a "Notes" field or column that goes with each business card's electronic file. Note down any information that wasn't on the card: what they do, what information or prospects they offered, when you met

them, and so on.

5 Create a rating system for great business contacts, so-so or potential business contacts and those you will probably never talk to again. You could use a numbering system: all 1s are great, 2s are so-so and 3s you'll never talk to, or you could use a green, yellow and red stoplight system respectively. Use a system you won't forget so that you can categorise your contacts.

6 Arrange the contacts the way you need them. You could alphabetise by the last name, or you can also categorise by alphabetical order of name or company; city where you met the person if you travel often; or by category of industry. This way you can just type the info you know into a search box and come up with a list of contacts qualified for your search.

Many computer contact organisation systems can sort contacts any way you need them and make them searchable, in case you only remember some part of what's there. If you can use one of these systems you can save yourself a lot of manual filing.

7 Organise business cards the old-fashioned way. Keep the cards in a Rolodex or business card holder. You can find business card holders in office supply stores.

* Even if it consists of a rubber band in your desk drawer can be a good backup for the computerised information.

* You will have to decide how you want to organise your business cards: by name, company, city, etc.

8 Whenever you get a new business card, write down the name of the place where you met the person on the back of the card within a few days of meeting. That way, you won't forget. Also jot a brief note on the back about what you talked about. When you contact the person later you can remind him where you met and ask how his kids are doing, or whatever you talked about.