

FEMINA

Inclusion of Women in the Cultural & Creative Sector

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Blended Training Program: Inclusion and Diversity within Cultural and Creative Sector (CCS)



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‘Femina - Inclusion of Women in the Cultural and Creative Sector’

Blended Training Program:

Inclusion and Diversity within Cultural and Creative Sector (CCS)

Networking as a Female Entrepreneur

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About Femina

'Femina – Inclusion of Women in the Cultural and Creative Sector' (2022-1-LU01-KA210-VET-000081625) is a collaborative project funded by Erasmus+ that aims to promote the participation of women in the cultural and creative sector. The project involves two partners, Luxembourg Creative Lab a.s.b.l. and Budakov Films Ltd., who have extensive experience working with creative individuals on various projects and initiatives. During our recruitment and freelancer search, we have identified specific groups of women within the cultural and creative sector:

- Women with creative backgrounds who are currently not employed in the same field but have the potential to contribute their skills and expertise.
- Women who may lack confidence in their digital skills, despite being actively involved in the cultural and creative sector.
- Women who are currently employed but aspire to embark on an entrepreneurial or freelance path within the cultural and creative sector.

By identifying and addressing the specific needs and challenges faced by these sub-segments of women, the project aims to foster inclusivity, support their professional development, and empower them to thrive in the cultural and creative field.

Unit 1: Business organizations supporting women

Tags: associations, chamber of commerce, membership, industry, groups

Unit 1 - Introduction

Working as a freelancer or a solo entrepreneur brings along personal freedom, financial gain and a sense of achievement that few regular jobs can offer. If you are reading this, you are already likely aware of this. However, working on your own comes with some challenges on its own.

There is no team to rely on, no colleagues to hand over the work to during your days off. Even having someone to complain to is often needed to share the burden. Furthermore – there is no HR team with a pre-made onboarding procedure to the new company. When challenges arise, a woman working on her own can really feel alone.

You don't have to be. Networking with fellow entrepreneurs and business professionals can help and this unit will show you how to reach out to them.

1.1. Support groups and where to find them

To be successful in your field of business, you must exploit the greatest natural resource shared by all businesswomen: other women in business. While you may not be colleagues at work – your fellow women at all levels of business likely share a common goal of success.

Support groups, business clubs and networking events stimulate collaboration and partnerships among members and help them establish themselves in business and protect their interests. Such groups keep their members informed about news in education, parenting, beauty, fashion, and other areas of interest.

By far the easiest way to reach out to support groups is online. You could join online communities and platforms specifically created for female entrepreneurs. Furthermore, social networks such as LinkedIn, Facebook Groups, and professional networking platforms often have dedicated groups for women in business.

Search for keywords like "female entrepreneurs," "women in business," or "women-led startups" to find relevant groups. Do not hesitate to participate in discussions, ask questions, and build connections with other members.

Look for local business organizations or chambers of commerce that have initiatives focused on supporting women in entrepreneurship. These organizations often organize events, workshops, and networking opportunities for women business owners. Reach out to them or check their websites to find out if they have specific programs or groups for female entrepreneurs.

1.2. Organizations for business women in Bulgaria

Bulgaria has had a limited time to develop an entrepreneurial culture. From 1944 to 1989, the country was a communist one-party state, where no private initiative was allowed. Despite some nominally progressive propaganda of the regime, women were generally expected to pursue gender specific traditional roles. All this changed rapidly in the 1990s, when capitalism was reintroduced to the country. Old associations were reestablished, and new ones flourished. The dynamic environment has persisted in the following decades with multiple organizations competing for membership.

1.2.1. Local chambers of commerce

Bulgaria has several business organizations, with some of the most prominent being the Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI) and the Bulgarian Industrial Association (BIA). Both associations have endorsed and actively promote female entrepreneurship and participate in local, as well as global events.

The BCCI is an influential non-governmental organization that represents and supports the interests of the Bulgarian business community. It is one of the oldest business organizations in Bulgaria, with a history dating back to 1895. The BCCI plays a crucial role in promoting economic growth, fostering trade relations, and supporting entrepreneurship in Bulgaria. The BIA is a competing association, established in the late 80s. It plays a significant role in shaping economic policies, promoting industrial development, and supporting the competitiveness of Bulgarian businesses.

The two associations have participated and supported various events, like “Women Entrepreneurs Day (WED)” and have dedicated sections for female businesswomen. You can reach out to them online, through their websites:

Bulgarian Industrial Association

Website: www.bia-bg.com

Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Website: www.bcci.bg

1.2.2. Professional associations for women entrepreneurs and freelancers

Bulgaria hosts several organizations dedicated exclusively to women. A good example is the Council of Women in Business in Bulgaria. Unlike the BCCI and the BIA, it is an association operating for public benefit with the main goals of establishing and promoting good practices and programs specifically for the professional development of women in small and medium-sized businesses and their growth into managerial positions. Simultaneously, the council supports young professionals to realize their potential in Bulgaria, and the development of projects aimed at strengthening businesses and nurturing talent in various business spheres.



Image 1 – Networking activity, organized by the Council of Women in Business in Bulgaria

Other organizations in Bulgaria include the “Biznes na visoki tokcheta” Club which roughly translates as Business in High Heels Clubs. While the club's name is without a doubt humorous, it also alludes to the challenges faced by women in the workplace. As you likely know high-heels are not among the most convenient shoes and are often reserved for the most formal of occasions.

When running your own business, you must be willing to constantly go outside your comfort zone and challenge yourself. The high-heels are a successful metaphor for this.

The club is noteworthy because they also publish an Almanac on women in business. Participation in the book, which is published yearly, is open to all businesswomen who pay an affordable fee.



Image 2 – Almanac of women-owned business in Bulgaria.

Similar practices including almanacs, who-is-who booklets and other marketing materials are being distributed in virtually all EU member states. While we do not mean to advertise this particular publication, it is still advisable that you state your presence in similar ones in your country. The participation fee is only a fraction of what would be necessary to produce and distribute a leaflet of your own.

Reaching out to organizations like these can also be easily achieved online and through their social media accounts.

You can learn more about these organizations following these links:

Club “Business in high heels”:

Website: www.clubvisokitokcheta.bg

Facebook: www.facebook.com/clubvisokitokcheta/

Council of Women in Business in Bulgaria

Website: www.womeninbusiness.bg

Facebook: www.facebook.com/CWBB.Bulgaria

1.3. Organizations for businesswomen in Luxembourg

Luxembourg has geographic advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, the country is by far the smallest EU member state, with a population of slightly over 600 000, the country is a

small market offering limited opportunities for prospective female entrepreneurs and fewer still dedicated professional associations.

On the other hand – Luxembourg is a developed economy, ranking high in both Human Development Index (HDI) and various ease of doing business ratings. Located in the political center of Europe, the country has long attracted people from across the continent. This is why many of the local professional associations include a multiethnic and multilingual community and have international branches.

1.3.1. Local chambers of commerce

The largest local trade association is the "Confédération Luxembourgeoise du Commerce" (CLC), which represents the interests of the commercial sector in Luxembourg. The CLC is a well-established employers' organization that advocates for the needs and concerns of businesses in the commerce industry. While it does have multiple female members, it is mostly focused on larger corporations, as opposed to small scale entrepreneurs.

Having said that, the confederation does support female entrepreneurs and female owned businesses with special programs and hosts events promoting equal access to development opportunities. It will be advisable to monitor the regular calendar of such associations and attend events of interest to your particular business.

Confédération luxembourgeoise du commerce

Website: www.clc.lu

Note that the official name of the organization is usually listed in French. Luxembourgers are generally multilingual with both French and German having official status in the country. French, however, has been traditionally seen as the preferred language of business.

1.3.2. Professional associations for women entrepreneurs and freelancers

Luxembourg has an active network of working professionals, who are dedicated to supporting each other in their entrepreneurial activities. You can reach out to such groups through social media or by attending events, organized by them. An excellent example for an active association is the Women in Business A.s.b.l (WIB). It is an independent national professional association, established in Luxembourg since 2005. Their stated mission is to bring together businesswomen by developing and encouraging opportunities to foster networking between women in all sectors, in all stages of their careers (CEO's, leaders, small business owners, managers) through dedicated cultural and social events.



Image 3 – participants in a seminar organized by Women in Business - Luxembourg

People working in the creative sector in particular can seek membership in the “Design Luxembourg” association. This is the local federation of all independent entrepreneurs and freelancers working in visual communications. It is affiliated with the Luxembourg Trade Confederation (clc) and is a good fit for businesswomen, working to discover valuable contacts in their work. You can reach out to these organizations through the following contacts.

Design Luxembourg

Website: www.designluxembourg.lu

Facebook: www.facebook.com/designluxembourg

LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/company/design-luxembourg

Women in Business

Website: www.womeninbusiness.lu

Key Takeaways

- Support groups, business clubs and networking events stimulate collaboration and partnerships among members and help them establish themselves in business and protect their interests.
- It is advisable to reach out to professional associations and participate in any joint marketing materials they may be producing – almanacs, who-is-who leaflets etc.

- Look for organizations dedicated to supporting female entrepreneurs. While the local chamber of commerce may have female members, or even a dedicated chapter, you could prioritize associations dedicated exclusively to women.

Recommendations for Further Reading

Presenting yourself in the best possible way to professional organizations is an equally important skill in business. We will discuss this issue in greater detail in Module 6: Lead like a Female Entrepreneur

References for Unit 1:

Women in Business Bulgaria - www.womeninbusiness.bg
Club “Business in High Heels” - www.clubvisokitokcheta.bg
Design Luxembourg - www.designluxembourg.lu
Bulgarian Industrial Association - www.bia-bg.com
Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry - www.bcci.bg

Unit 2: Organizing networking activities

Tags: events, community, workshops, meetings, team-building

Unit 2 - Introduction

The associations presented in Unit 1 are only a small fraction of all support groups available to female entrepreneurs, regardless of whether they are based in Bulgaria, Luxembourg or another country. However, it is possible that after doing your own thorough research it appears that no organization is particularly well tailored to the needs of your business.

Where others see a problem, you – as an entrepreneur yourself – should see a possibility. If no one else has done it, perhaps you are the best suited person to reach out to other colleagues in the cultural and creative sector and organize networking events without the need of middlemen such as the professional associations.

2.1. Types of networking events

The main point of having networking events is to enable participants to meet and get to know each other, discuss ideas and collaboration opportunities, as well as to share personal aspects of life. Not all events need to be formal, as you can consider organizing cultural and lifestyle events such as wine seminars with tastings, culinary lessons with local and international celebrities, and various activities related to relaxation and leisure, including travel, nature walks, and even beauty procedures.

There are a few broad categories in which the various possible activities can be combined into:

- **Professional seminars and workshops**

To organize a successful seminar, you must first identify the key topics, which interest female entrepreneurs. Brand development and management, as well as legal and business-related questions are obvious starting locations. However, as a female entrepreneur, you could consider involving other topics such as the gender pay-gap, facing stereotypes at work, as well as some topics specific to the creative and cultural sectors – design, art management, intellectual property rights etc.

The second key component of a good seminar is featuring leading specialists in their field and influential figures. Look for university professors, or business professionals who are outspoken about the topics that you are interested in.

Good examples of these type of events include the sheleader.digital conference in Bulgaria (www.sheleader.digital), as well as the Women at the Top event in Luxembourg (www.womenluxembourg.live.ft.com).

- **Mentorship programs**

A critically important and often overlooked benefit of networking events is the so-called peer-to-peer learning. Mentorship groups provide a platform for female entrepreneurs to connect with experienced mentors or form groups with fellow entrepreneurs. These intimate gatherings often involve sharing challenges, receiving guidance, and building lasting relationships.

Mentors need not be competitors in the same field. The cultural and creative sector has a distinct advantage in that it provides for various career opportunities that can complement each other, rather than compete. This is the core value of networking after all. The Cherie Blair Foundation is an example of an organization that facilitates mentorship for female entrepreneurs (www.cherieblairfoundation.org).

- **Teambuilding activities**

While it is true that you and other female entrepreneurs are not colleagues in the traditional sense (i.e. working for the same company) it does help to foster this collegial atmosphere amongst each-other. 4

Women working as freelancers and solo entrepreneurs will inevitably discover how challenging not having peers at work can be. The obvious solution is to find some on your own.

Typical teambuilding events include exhibitions, fashion shows, music evenings, literary clubs, poetry recitals, book presentations among others. Sports events should also be considered as part of the calendar, including activities such as golf lessons, horse riding, pilates, yoga, water aerobics, dancing, beach volleyball, tennis, bowling, karting, and more.

These types of events can be seen as both an opportunity to relieve stress (something which we will discuss in greater detail in Module 8: Stress management in the Cultural and Creative Sector) and a platform to establish new business contacts.

2.2. Organizing a networking event

As an entrepreneur yourself, you should be adept at organizing events. This will be useful for you not only as a manager of your own business, but while considering networking opportunities. The first step in any such endeavor is to determine the objectives and the purpose of the event. Are you aiming to provide networking opportunities, offer educational sessions, or focus on a specific industry? Clarifying your goals will help shape the event's structure and content. Once you are confident in this regard, target a specific group of female entrepreneurs you want to cater to. Consider factors such as industry, experience level, location, and interests. This will help you tailor the event to meet their needs and preferences.

It is said that there are three important things to manage when setting up an event – location, location and location. All humor aside, the importance of selecting the proper location for any networking event cannot be understated. Once you have the event space in mind, the format and duration begin to take shape.

After the Covid-19 pandemic, an important distinction must be made between live events, virtual events, as well as hybrid events, which include both attending in place and online participants. This consideration reflects on all aspects of the meeting – including budget, location etc.

Identify and invite influential and knowledgeable speakers who can contribute valuable insights and expertise. Collaborate with relevant organizations, industry experts, or sponsors who can provide support, resources, or funding for the event.

Create a schedule and agenda for the event, including sessions, workshops, panel discussions, and networking activities. Ensure a balance between educational content and networking opportunities, allowing attendees to engage with each other and gain actionable knowledge.

You should prepare a program and script. The program of an event is the official timetable which is available for all guests. The script on the other hand is something that only the organizers have. Specific timings among the two may differ. For example, compare the example in table 1:

| Event program | Event script |
|-------------------------|--|
| 11:00 – Keynote address | 10:00 – Keynote speaker arrives at venue |
| 12:00 – Q&A session | 10:30 – Sound system testing |
| 12:30 – Lunch break | 11:00 – Keynote speech begins |
| | 11:50 – Setting up microphones in the venue for the Q&A session. |
| | 12:00 – Q&A begins |
| | 12:10 – Catering company arrives |

| | |
|--|------|
| | Etc. |
|--|------|

Table 1 – Comparison between an event program and event script

As table 1 illustrates – not all activities during the event need to be communicated with the attendees. The script is internal and contains information, which is largely irrelevant for the guests, but important for the organizers.

Setting up an online registration system to streamline the attendee registration process is generally a good idea. You could use something as simple as creating a Facebook event and rely on people to declare whether or not they will attend, or “are interested” to use Facebook terminology. You can find more information on how to manage your company Facebook profile in Module 4: Social Media Guide for Women-Owned Businesses.

Keep in mind that the number of people likely to attend any event is different from the self-declared attendees in any platform, whether it is Facebook or another online registration. Always assume that fewer people will turn out than the declared ones. For example – if you require 50 attendants to your networking event, you need to reach out to at least 75 to ensure that you will have sufficient numbers.

2.3. Managing your event space

Assuming that you have selected a proper venue for your networking event you still require some arrangements of the space within the said venue. Not all seating configurations are equally conducive to networking and encouraging people to mingle with another after any formal introductions or lectures.

The traditional lecture format (see image 4) generally creates a separation between the lecturer and the attendees, even if the latter are in fact successful businesswomen in their own right. In these circumstances, the “Classroom” layout of the room is selected to strengthen the position of the speaker.

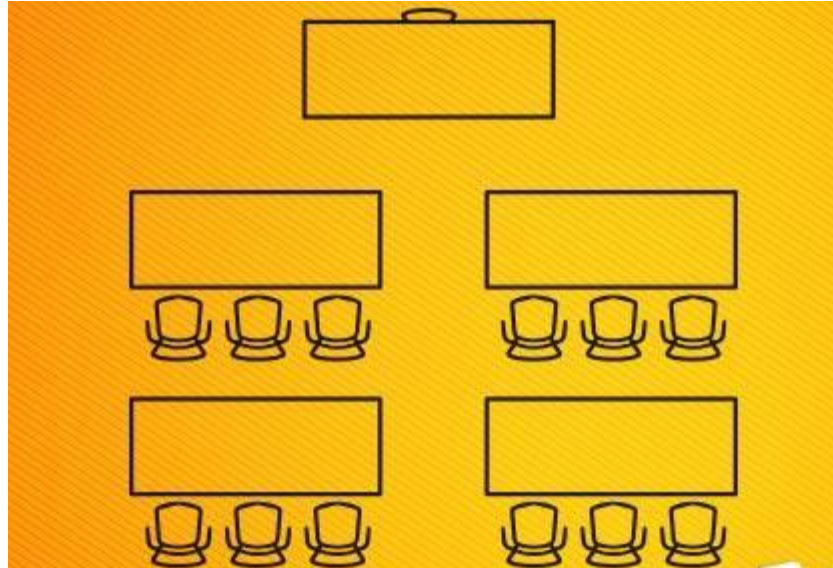


Image 4 – “Classroom” layout type for an event. Source: meetings.skift.com

However, in the specific circumstances of creating a networking event for women working in the cultural and creative sector, the “Classroom” setup may not be appropriate. It has two major drawbacks:

- It is not conducive to brainstorming and networking. Listeners are instead expected to be passive.
- It may not be a good fit for business women working in the cultural and creative sector, because it is often perceived as outdated and boring.

So how should you arrange your room, assuming that you have invited at least one speaker and you have some stage for your event. You could opt for a less formal U-shaped talk. This way participants see each other in addition to the speakers and are more likely to interact with one another. Having desks in the room is in line with the classic “U-shaped” setup (see image 5). This is helpful if participants are expected to be taking notes. An even less formal variation of this layout is the “Horseshoe”, where there are only chairs but no desks. Ideally, the speaker should not have a desk or a raised stage in this variation either.

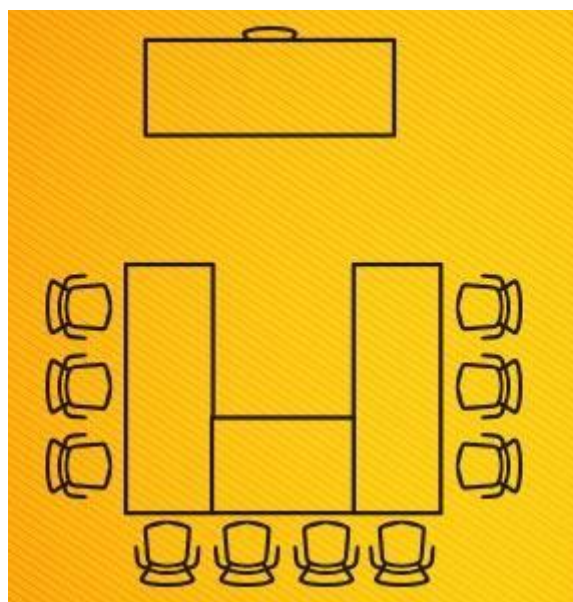


Image 5 – “Classroom” layout type for an event. Source: meetings.skift.com

An alternative especially well suited for creative people is the “Clusters set up”. In this variation, the event space is tailor made for teamwork and mingling. The speakers have a secondary function, often limited to setting tasks or presenting the results of individual networking clusters.

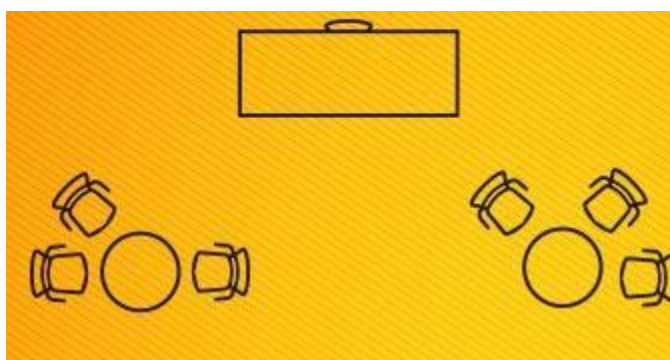


Image 6 – “Clusters” layout type for an event. Source: meetings.skift.com

Notice how not all chairs are even facing the speaker/stage of the networking event. The speaker's role is very limited in this setup and the stage will likely remain empty for the better part of the event. The clusters are often not symmetrical, but should remain relatively balanced in terms of seats, to ensure that all participants have equal access to the networking process.

2.4. Promoting your planned events

The success of your networking event requires a comprehensive marketing and promotional strategy to raise awareness and attract attendees. Utilize various channels such as social media, email marketing, targeted advertisements, industry publications, and personal networks. Leverage partnerships with influencers or organizations that can help spread the word.

This takes us back to unit 1 of this Module. Membership in professional organizations is a good way to reach out to potential partners and other women working in the cultural and creative sectors. Consider whether or not you have a specific group of female entrepreneurs you want to reach. Their demographics, interests and preferred communication channels are all factors you need to take into account. This will help you tailor your marketing messages and select the most effective promotional methods.

The go-to method for most first time organizers of a networking event are social media. Leverage your presence on LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, to promote your event. Create engaging posts, share relevant content, and use event-specific hashtags to increase visibility. Consider running targeted advertisements or sponsored posts to reach a wider audience.

More experienced event organizers can use additional tools such as content marketing. Write compelling email subject lines and personalized messages to increase open rates. Highlight key event details, speakers, and any exclusive offers to encourage registrations to your event. You may not have enough contact information in the first networking event you organize, but as registrants come over time, you could collect this data from them.

Furthermore, you could reach out to local media outlets, such as newspapers, magazines, or radio stations, to pitch your event as a newsworthy story. Offer to provide interviews, expert opinions, or guest articles related to women entrepreneurship and the significance of networking events.

Key Takeaways

- If there are no ongoing networking events in your area, perhaps you can seize the opportunity and organize one yourself.
- Choosing the right location and arranging the event space is critical to the success of the networking event.
- Promote your event on social media, taking into account the demographics, interests and preferred communication channels of your fellow entrepreneurs.

Recommendations for Further Reading

Promoting and organizing an event requires knowledge in how to manage a company profile on social media. You can learn more about this in [Module 4: Social Media guide for Female Entrepreneurs](#).

References for Unit 2:

White, B. (2023). Networking Tips for Young Professionals: LinkedIn

Cote, C. (2022). Networking for Entrepreneurs. HBS Online

Franco, M. (2020). The Science of Networking: Research to help you network better. Psychology Today.

Clark, D. (2014). Networking for Introverts: Strategies to Thrive in Networking Events. Harvard Business Review.

Unit 3: The secrets of effective networking

Tags: etiquette, clothing, elevator pitch, conversations, social interactions

Unit 3 - Introduction

Organizer or attendee – either way you must make yourself known at any networking event. It is not enough to be present in order to make your presence there worthwhile. But how can you ensure that people will remember you and your business out of many other participants? This can be intimidating for many women, and it should be noted that creative people are oftentimes introverts, who put out their energy into art better than in interpersonal communications.

Luckily enough, there are a few tips and tricks that can help you along the way. We will explore these in greater detail in this Unit.

3.1. The five principles of a good conversation

Starting a conversation with a stranger can be daunting, even if the two of you are both women engaged in similar roles in your own companies. Work-related questions are an obvious conversation started during networking events, but are not the only way to engage another participant in conversation. Furthermore – there are steps that you need to make even before you start speaking.

- **Be Approachable**

The first step is to create an inviting and approachable presence by maintaining open body language, smiling, and making eye contact. This makes it easier for others to initiate conversations with you. Begin conversations with light and easy topics, such as the event itself, the venue, or common interests. This helps break the ice and establish a comfortable atmosphere.

- Practice active listening

In short – this means giving your full attention to the person you're speaking with. Show genuine interest in what they're saying, ask follow-up questions, and engage in meaningful conversation. Avoid constantly scanning the room or looking for other people to talk to. Authenticity is key in networking. Be yourself and let your personality shine through. People are more likely to connect with you when they sense authenticity.

- **Exchange Business Cards or Contact Information**

When appropriate, exchange business cards or contact information with the individuals you meet. This enables you to stay connected after the event and continue building the relationship. After the event, make an effort to follow up with the people you connected with. Send personalized messages expressing your pleasure in meeting them and expressing interest in continuing the conversation. This helps solidify the connection and opens the door for further communication and collaboration.

- **Be Mindful of Time**

While it's important to have meaningful conversations, be mindful of the time you spend with each person. Allow for interactions to flow naturally, but be aware of others who may be waiting to engage in conversations as well. When discussing something with a fellow entrepreneur it may be tempting to stay in the conversation for longer. Of course, you shouldn't stop yourself mid-sentence, but instead take this opportunity to share contact details – such as business cards, phone numbers or social media data.

- **Be Respectful and Inclusive**

Embrace diversity and inclusivity in your interactions. Show respect for different backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences. Engage with a wide range of people, not just those who are similar to you. Women in business still face some stereotypes and further efforts are needed to minimize them. If you have experienced some of this yourself, you could share your personal story to others. Perhaps it will end up inspiring people to do a better job themselves.

Conversations with peers are an excellent opportunity to alleviate some of the work related stress that you may have accumulated. We will discuss this in greater detail in Module 8: Stress management in the Cultural and Creative Sector.

3.2. Prepare your elevator pitch

In the dynamic and fast-paced world of the cultural and creative sector, mastering the art of delivering an elevator pitch can be a game-changer for your success. An elevator pitch is a concise and captivating summary of your product, idea, or project, designed to capture attention and spark interest in a short amount of time.

Originating from the concept of having a brief elevator ride to engage someone's interest, an elevator pitch typically lasts between 30 seconds to two minutes. As a businesswoman in the cultural and creative sector, being able to articulate the essence of your proposition effectively can open doors to new opportunities, partnerships, and funding.

Crafting an elevator pitch requires careful thought and preparation. It involves distilling complex information into a clear and engaging message that highlights the unique features and benefits

of your offering. Remember, the goal is to leave a lasting impression and prompt further interest and discussion.

That is indeed a lot that you must fit within a maximum of two minutes, but there are some key tips which can help you develop your elevator pitch:

- Begin your pitch with a compelling statement or question that grabs the listener's attention. Use vivid language, storytelling techniques, or intriguing statistics to pique curiosity.
- Clearly articulate the problem or gap in the market that your product, idea, or project addresses. Demonstrate your understanding of the challenges faced by your target audience in the cultural and creative sector.
- Concisely explain how your offering solves the identified problem or fulfills the unmet need. Focus on the unique features, innovation, or creative approach that sets your product apart from the competition.
- Tailor your elevator pitch to resonate with the specific interests and values of your target audience. Understand their needs, preferences, and pain points to effectively communicate the value of your product, idea, or project.
- Rehearse your elevator pitch until it flows naturally and confidently. Seek feedback from peers or mentors in the cultural and creative sector to ensure that your pitch is impactful and resonates with your intended audience.

Remember, an elevator pitch is not just about delivering information; it's about creating a memorable and engaging experience. Mastering this skill will enable you to seize opportunities, forge meaningful connections, and showcase your expertise as in the cultural and creative sector.

3.3. How to dress for networking events

The appropriate attire for a networking event can vary depending on the level of formality. Women in particular always have a harder time in selecting the proper outfit. While male suits are fairly straightforward and leave little room for variations, women face more challenges. This issue is further complicated by the specificities of the cultural and creative sector. Women may not usually wear traditional female suits in some art related professions, unlike other businesswomen in law, finance, government etc.

In this unit we will go over the main types of outfits, based on formality and discuss their applicability in the cultural and creative sector.

- **Business Formal**

If the event is labeled as "business formal," opt for more professional and polished attire. A tailored suit in a solid color or a conservative dress with a blazer would be appropriate. Choose neutral or dark colors and pair them with closed-toe shoes. Accessories should be minimal and tasteful.

Events, requiring a business formal attire tend to be rare among artists and people of creative work. Examples of such may include awards ceremonies, new product reveals, attending lectures etc.

- **Business Casual**

For a business casual networking event, you have more flexibility. Consider wearing a well-fitted dress or skirt with a blouse, or tailored pants with a blouse or a sweater. You can incorporate some color and patterns into your outfit while still maintaining a professional appearance. Pair your outfit with closed-toe shoes or dressy flats. This is generally appropriate for networking events or meetings with clients.

Women in the arts, culture and creative industries can look more “artistic” if they choose not to be very strict with their outfit. You could add something – a color, or a decoration for example, which can be identified as a signature item of yours.

- **Smart Casual**

A smart casual networking event allows for a more relaxed and stylish attire. You can opt for a dress, a skirt with a blouse, or dress pants with a stylish top. Incorporate a blazer or a cardigan for a polished look. Choose comfortable yet fashionable footwear, such as heels, flats, or stylish boots.

For an even more casual networking event, you have more freedom to express your personal style. You can wear a blouse with jeans or dress pants, a casual dress, or a skirt with a stylish top. You can opt for comfortable yet presentable footwear, such as flats, sandals, or fashionable sneakers.



Image 7 – Business Casual vs Business Formal attire. Source: Pinterest

It's important to note that while these guidelines provide a general framework, it's also essential to consider the specific industry, culture, and location of the event. If you're unsure about the dress code, it's always better to err on the side of slightly more formal attire rather than being underdressed. Additionally, paying attention to personal grooming, neatness, and appropriateness for the event is crucial, regardless of the level of formality.

Key Takeaways

- Work related topics are not the only options for conversation starters in networking events. Begin with small talk, be open minded and mind your body language.
- Prepare an elevator pitch, because it will almost certainly be of use in networking events. Practice makes perfect, so make sure you rehearse it.
- It is usually better to be a bit overdressed than underdressed. Having said that – people with creative and artistic professions can make use of more non standard solutions to improve themselves.

Recommendations for Further Reading

In this unit we briefly mentioned that networking opportunities and genuine conversations with peers can greatly assist with stress management. For more information on that see Module 8: Stress management in the Cultural and Creative Sector.

We will discuss the concept of “Active listening” again in Module 6: Leading like a Female Entrepreneur.

References for Unit 3:

Kelly, C., & London, S. (2005). Dress Your Best: The Complete Guide to Finding the Style That's Right for Your Body.

Rothman, L. A. (2013). Style Bible: What to Wear to Work.

Good Practices

Eva Doncheva: Some owners are more competitive than collaborative, but I am definitely of the collaborative type



We discussed networking with Bulgarian entrepreneur Evelina Doncheva, who runs the “Listopadna (Leaf Falling - in Bulgarian) art gallery”. This is a gift shop for handmade crafts, where she collaborates with 30 other Bulgarian artists. At the gallery she sells unique jewelry and home decoration and organizes different workshops for both amateurs and craftsmen who want to try something new.

“Listopadna art gallery” has existed since 7th of February 2020 and Evelina has had to develop it during the pandemic without moving the business online. Her decision has ultimately paid off, through perseverance and has since been helpful in making.

Are the entrepreneurs in your industry competitive or collaborative? Could you provide examples of collaborative projects?

Well, some shop owners are more competitive than collaborative, while others are very open to joint projects and networking. I am definitely of the collaborative type. We work with different artists, so we are not really each other's competition. The work that we do is unique and we can only benefit from sharing it with each other's clients.

We have very good collaborations with some owners of online businesses – some of them are glad to use my gallery like their showroom or make appointments with their customers here. One of my favorite examples here is the collaboration with “Lunaria”, a brand for “paintings” made by real dried flowers. Simona Krushkina – the creator of this beautiful project – started with us 4 years ago when I organized art bazaars. She came to us because no one gave her till then the chance to show her art and when she got it, she flourished, and the brand too.

There's a community – mix and match – which is trying now to support other collaborations like ours, but I'm not an optimist.

How do you maintain your relations with other entrepreneurs? Does it help you in business?

Sometimes I go to other shops like mine or to art bazaars like a customer. When the colleagues hear I have a business and I don't sell online, they show a bit of interest.

I am very picky when it comes to my business acquaintances and I let them know I work only with artists who have all the legal registrations and can give me invoices. Unfortunately in Bulgaria much of the cultural and creative sector is still part of the gray economy. This hinders collaborations at the level of the local chamber of commerce or other professional organizations.

Having said that, I also have several colleagues in Sofia with similar shops who share my values. We constantly exchange products, refer clients or share the taxes for participating in art bazaars. By doing this we provide each other more visibility and make the events cheaper.

How can a new entrepreneur get involved with the business community in your country?

Well, it depends. On one hand, handmade and freelance groups on Facebook are flourishing. But that is not a guarantee you can receive online correct information about how to start your own business. In social media there are many ill-disposed people too, so it's better if you want to get involved with the business community to search for those who share your values.

It's really difficult because of the legal problems and attitudes I shared above, but I'm sure everyone can reach his people – colleagues and customers – if has patience and hopes to search hard enough.

Tips & Recommendations

- Support groups, business clubs, and networking events foster collaboration and partnerships among members, aiding in establishing themselves in business and safeguarding their interests.
- It is recommended to reach out to professional associations and participate in any joint marketing materials they may produce, such as almanacs or who's who leaflets.
- Seek out organizations specifically dedicated to supporting female entrepreneurs, and consider checking if the local chamber of commerce has female members.
- If there are no existing networking events in your area, take the initiative to organize one yourself and seize the opportunity.
- Selecting the right location and arranging the event space are crucial factors contributing to the success of a networking event.
- Promote your event on social media, taking into account the demographics, interests, and preferred communication channels of fellow entrepreneurs.
- Conversation starters at networking events don't have to be limited to work-related topics. Begin with small talk, maintain an open mind, and be mindful of your body language

Glossary

Chamber of commerce - A chamber of commerce is an association of businesses and organizations in a specific geographic area. Its purpose is to promote and protect the interests of local businesses, foster economic growth, and provide networking opportunities for its members. Chambers of commerce often organize events, offer business support services, and advocate for business-related policies.

Elevator pitch - An elevator pitch is a concise and compelling presentation of an idea, product, or oneself, typically lasting around 30 seconds to two minutes—the time it takes to ride an elevator. It aims to capture the listener's attention and effectively convey the key points or value proposition in a concise manner. Elevator pitches are commonly used in networking situations and when seeking potential business opportunities.

Mentorship - Mentorship is a professional relationship where an experienced individual, known as a mentor, provides guidance, advice, and support to a less experienced person, known as a mentee. Mentors share their knowledge, expertise, and insights to help mentees develop their skills, make informed decisions, and navigate their careers or specific areas of interest.

Mingling - Mingling refers to the act of socializing and interacting with others in a casual or informal setting. In networking contexts, mingling involves engaging in conversations with various individuals, getting to know them, and building connections. It is a common practice during events, conferences, and business gatherings.

Networking - Networking refers to the process of establishing and nurturing professional relationships with individuals and groups to exchange information, contacts, and resources. It often involves attending events, socializing, and engaging in conversations to expand one's professional network.

References

Women in Business Bulgaria - www.womeninbusiness.bg

Club “Business in High Heels” - www.clubvisokitokcheta.bg

Design Luxembourg - www.designluxembourg.lu

Bulgarian Industrial Association - www.bia-bg.com

Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry - www.bcci.bg

White, B. (2023). Networking Tips for Young Professionals: LinkedIn

Cote, C. (2022). Networking for Entrepreneurs. HBS Online

Franco, M. (2020). The Science of Networking: Research to help you network better. Psychology Today.

Clark, D. (2014). Networking for Introverts: Strategies to Thrive in Networking Events. Harvard Business Review.

Kelly, C., & London, S. (2005). Dress Your Best: The Complete Guide to Finding the Style That's Right for Your Body.

Rothman, L. A. (2013). Style Bible: What to Wear to Work.

Check Your Knowledge (Multiple Choice with one correct answer)

1. When were Bulgarian professional associations reestablished after decades of suppression.

- a) In 1989 after the fall of the communist regime.
- b) In 2007 after Bulgaria joined the European Union.
- c) In 2011 after the Bulgarian parliament adopted new laws regulating local professional associations.
- d) Bulgarian professional associations were never suppressed, some trace their history back to the late 19th century.

2. Why is it important to participate in almanacs, who-is-who booklets and other marketing materials, produced by professional associations?

- a) It isn't. Businesses gain nothing by sharing media exposure with potential competitors.
- b) The participation fee is only a fraction of what would be necessary to produce and distribute a leaflet of your own.
- c) Customers trust almanacs more than individual advertising.
- d) It is mandatory to be included, if you want to be part of a local professional association.

3. Which of the following are professional associations in Luxembourg, dedicated to empowering female entrepreneurs?

- a) Design Luxembourg and Women in Business.
- b) Platform for Business and Luxembourg Club.
- c) Union of Female Entrepreneurs in Luxembourg.
- d) Since Luxembourg is such a small country, there are no organizations dedicated to female entrepreneurs.

4. What is one of the main purposes of networking events?

- a) To showcase personal achievements in front of other entrepreneurs
- b) To compete with other participants in various tournament games
- c) To learn about the latest fashion trends amongst female entrepreneurs.
- d) To meet and get to know other entrepreneurs, who are facing the same challenges that you are.

5. Which of the following are categories of networking events for entrepreneurs?

- a) Mentorship programs

- b) Professional seminars and workshops
- c) Teambuilding activities
- d) All of the above

6. How should you arrange the event space if you want to create a less formal atmosphere?

- a) Use a classic classroom layout for the room.
- b) Arrange any chairs in open U-shaped forms.
- c) Remove seating options altogether, thus encouraging greater mobility amongst participants.
- d) Arrange the seating in a randomized manner across the room.

7. What is an elevator pitch?

- a) A type of event which is deliberately held in confined spaces to encourage networking.
- b) The background music, which is designed to create a friendly atmosphere among participants in the event.
- c) A brief presentation of yourself and your business. Ideally something you could say to a potential business partner for the duration of an average elevator ride.
- d) A short note, distributed to participants which includes the program for the event.

8. While at a networking event, how can you establish an inviting and approachable presence for yourself?

- a) Maintaining open body language, smile, and make eye contact, when initiating conversations.
- b) Wear work-related clothing or uniform to demonstrate clearly that you are one of the participants.
- c) Be inquisitive and ask other participants personal questions in order to break the ice.
- d) Begin conversations with jokes about the event, attendants and/or yourself.

9. Which of the following outfits would count as being “business casual”?

- a) There is no such thing as “business casual”. Outfits can be either for business or casual.
- b) A tailored suit in a solid color or a conservative dress.
- c) A well-fitted dress or skirt with a blouse, or tailored pants with a blouse or a sweater.
- d) T-shirts without any labels and jeans.

10. Why is it important to be mindful of the time, while networking at events?

- a) Events have a very strict schedule and you wouldn't want to miss out on parts of them.
- b) It is considered inappropriate to have conversations which are too short. (Less than 3 minutes).
- c) Because there might be other people waiting to communicate with you or with the person you are speaking to.
- d) Because women tend to talk too long on insignificant matters.