LITTLE NETWORKS BUILD LARGE NETWORKS

Take the case of John Lamie, a man now in his sixties who, at age fifty-seven, became the founder, president, and only full-time employee of a highly successful business venture known as Asia Dispensing.

While working for companies such as Elizabeth Arden and Paco Raban for many years, John enjoyed a successful career in the packaging business. If you have ever sprayed perfume into the air or pumped hand cream from a high-end cosmetic dispenser, you’ve probably used a device that he helped design and manufacture.

After a long career with several large packaging companies, John began to take an objective look at both his profession and his professional situation. He drew some hard conclusions.

First, the higher you go in a large organization, the higher the B.S. factor becomes.

Second, this dishonest atmosphere saps you of passion for the work you truly love.

Third, the way out of this dilemma is to start your own business.

Fourth, the risk of starting your own entrepreneurial venture is real, yes, but this...
danger is strongest during startup. Think things through, have a good business plan, and, over time, a carefully managed business will deliver the kind of financial and psychological rewards that are simply not available to people who work at large corporations.

In 2005, John Lamie took the leap.

A respected client had once told him he was a “solution-finding kind of guy.” Taking this testimonial to heart, he started brainstorming new business ideas from backward to forward; that is, he tried to determine which particular solutions best fit which specific problems he had encountered in the packaging industry.

Eventually, John decided that the solution a majority of American packaging companies needed most was to find a successful way of doing business with China, which in 2005 had already become the world leader in package production.

Business standards and practices in China, John knew from experience, were often diametrically opposed to those in the West. What was considered fair and normal practice among Chinese companies was often perceived as unfair and unethical in the West—and vice versa. There were also the bugbears of culture clash, political suspicion, personal mistrust, and of course, language differences. While access to low-cost quality package manufacturing in China was attractive to American cosmetics companies, doing business there on a day-to-day basis clearly required a crash course in cultural social relations.

But then, John Lamie was a solutions guy.

As per his plan, John started out by contacting packaging factories in China and establishing personal phone relations. Then he traveled to various Chinese cities to meet the people in his industry and to inspect their facilities.

Once he made these contacts and secured friendly relationships with Chinese colleagues, John got in touch with his own business contacts at home, seeking their help, advice, and financial support.

This project helped position him as an expert in the field, and made him visible to thousands of potential customers who might otherwise never have known his name.

To reinforce this existing (and ever-growing) network of allies, customers, and associates, John also launched a newsletter that provided a highly informative overview of important trends and news in the American packaging industry.
Finally, John set up a website for his new company that offered useful information to readers and, just as importantly from a networking perspective, allowed people in his industry to learn about his company and to contact him quickly and directly.

John Lamie, in short, used his existing network connections to build an even bigger network, and then worked it to the max. Next year, John tells us, Asia Dispensing Company with its one employee expects to have over $50 million in revenues.

How did he do it? Networking, networking, networking.