

5 Reasons Why ‘Offlining’ Is Pivotal to Success

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Everywhere you look, there is a push for a more digital-focused presence. Business strategies often revolve entirely around building a great website and having a strong and widespread digital footprint. While it’s true that an online presence is important, there is still a place for offline interactions, especially in business relationships. (I’d argue that, in fact, building offline relationships is actually a key component of successful digitization.) After all, if you don’t have a foundation of relationships, you have little to build on. Why?

1. “Offlining” helps uncover new ideas for a business

In my experience, the offline network of acquaintances and peers that I’ve built has been an essential part of generating new ideas for my enterprise. When you have in-person interactions, you can read nuances in tone, body language and expression. You can better hear and see the problems they’re bringing to you, and so have deeper, more meaningful insights, on both sides. It’s also much easier to analyze problems in an offline setting, because I have more information to help me offer better and more specific solutions.

Without my offline relationships, I simply would not have had

the same amount of successful ideas, nor would I have been able to fully understand the problems that my target demographic faces.

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2. It builds stronger relationships with partners and colleagues

Nothing can replace a positive face-to-face interaction, particularly with business partners or team members. People like being able to “receive guests”, even if it’s just welcoming someone into their office space. (You can even send a text first to ask if you can come over.) It’s hardwired into our “business DNA” to enjoy hosting others, and it helps deepen bonds. I have visited offices all over the world, from Shanghai and Hong Kong to Dubai and England, and that dynamic has been the same: even if there are cultural or personality differences, people like having in-person interactions. It helps both parties feel more connected, and fosters a more pleasant and collaborative work environment.

3. It improves rapport with potential clients

People want to feel that their business will be appropriately valued if they decide to utilize your services, and to maximize that relationship, you need a blend of online and offline interactions. Because, no matter how hard you try, there will always be a barrier of impersonality to digital interactions – never mind the propensity of methods like emails and texts to be misunderstood. Video calls can help, but there is still a level of disconnect in them that must be overcome.

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So, if you are looking to recruit new clients, especially ones that might bring you a considerable amount of business, make the time and money investment of meeting with them in person. One tactic I apply: If I'm already planning to travel abroad for leisure, I take the time to see if there are any potential or existing clients whom I can stop in and see. To some people, this might seem an unnecessary inconvenience, but I have found, time and again, that this level of thoughtfulness builds true rapport, not only with clients but with their extended circle. Word of mouth is still the most trusted form of advertising.

4. It creates opportunities that would not be there otherwise

One story in particular highlights for me just how critical offline interactions are for business development: A colleague and I were traveling to Canada, and since we were going to be there a while, emailed a number of companies to let them know we would be pleased to meet with them. Strangely, not a single one confirmed an appointment before departure! After we arrived, we went to a nearby area where several of the companies we were interested in were based. We grabbed some coffee and simply went door to door, introducing ourselves with no strings attached. By the end of the day, we had at least half a dozen meetings with people who were thrilled to host us.

If we had been discouraged by that initial lack of digital communication, we'd have lost out on many opportunities to establish relationships. So, it's always in your best interest to take the initiative and simply show up – with no expectation other than simply to make yourself known, and available.

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5. It helps you become a strong and well-rounded leader

As a society, we have lost a bit of our in-person initiative, because we are so used to the “safety” of digital interactions. We think that if an email or text message is unanswered, we can avoid in-the-moment anxiety about how to handle the situation... and if meeting requests go unconfirmed, it's easy to qualify that as disinterest without pursuing anything further. However, great leaders are the ones who *seek out* the more challenging offline interactions – they learn how to handle online back-and-forth, certainly, but also how to manage offline interpersonal dynamics, regardless of how challenging they might occasionally be.

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