

# Business Networks Management

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## Chief Networking Officer (CNO): the new executive

*I have once written an article about CNO – Chief Networking Officer and debated if this position would be suitable for the new corporate world where long term relationships and win-win partnerships are gaining more and more importance on daily basis. I entitled myself Chief Networking Officer and created a new business – Net-bridges – offering services on business networks coaching, training and executive networking events. In the meantime, I was very glad when I discovered that there are a growing number of professional CNOs worldwide. I decided to interview a pioneer in the field, **Selma Prodanovic, CNO of brainswork™**.*

### What was your previous experience before you become a CNO?

After studying international marketing, I worked in Headquarters for Central & Eastern Europe of worldwide advertising networks where I developed our offices but also coordinated the market entries of 25 different multinational clients in 15 countries. The most fascinating part of my work was to connect with individuals within the worldwide network, and locate transferable knowledge and experience on each specific client. By the way, one of my favourite contacts was in your home country Brazil.

Later on, my international work continued as I coordinated the work of film crews while shooting TV commercials for example in Venezuela, Germany, New Zealand and South Africa at the same time. But I also worked in investment consulting, teaching, training, lecturing, strategic marketing consulting and communications. In short, after 15 years of new business development I started my own business end of 2003.

### What motivated you to become a CNO? When/how did this happen?

I am a passionate networker and I am personally devoted to progress achieved through networking and brainstorming.

I lived in several countries in Europe and Africa, and was educated in four different educational systems, so while moving from one country to another, I had to learn already as a child, how important social networking was, especially when starting from scratch.

## Apresentação



Octavio Pitaluga Neto

CNO - Chief Networking Officer of TEN - Top Executives Net and Net-bridges. Certified coach coach, trainer and public speaker. Specialized in Business Networks Management.

every one of us can make a positive difference, but it works best if we make our diversity connected – and later on it developed to be a professional and academic interest.

Also, I did not have a “straight” career. This seemed to be a disadvantage at one point because I did not fit in the already existing “boxes” but then I realized that exactly this diversity of experiences and people I met, is my biggest asset and greatest strength. I enjoy connecting these various aspects of my life and business. My passion for networking culminated when I started brainswork™ the creative business development group now already working in three continents, and became Chief Networking Officer.

#### **What’s your routine as CNO ?**

I spend part of my day at the computer managing contacts and preparing content for clients, and the other lecturing in networks, meeting network members, or participating in networking events. I consult more than a dozen various networks worldwide, but also consult and coach individuals and companies on how to profit from networking and to be more efficient. I am currently working on various research projects, developing a course on business networking with an international university, preparing a book, writing articles, or giving interviews as this one.

It is important to note that my primary business is new business development, and networking is on one hand a tool I use to efficiently and successfully reach my business goals, and on the other hand, simply my way of being.

#### **What are your major networks today (please mention some industries and level of contacts, e.g., airlines and Marketing Directors)?**

My network includes international top management and government officials but also contacts I made in my kid’s kindergarten (which turned into fantastic business cooperation). I love the variety of my networks which gives me the freedom to choose both the people I work with and the projects I work on. In general this approach delivers top results which mean happy clients, who then lead to more recommendations, and more business... Although I have an international and very diverse network, and clients ranging from USA to Ukraine the majority of my contacts relates to the South-East of Europe, and to entrepreneurs especially in creative industries. I work with innovative technology start-ups, but also work on development strategies of cities and even countries.

#### **How do your work with media?**

An efficient relationship to the “mightiest” network is very important. I have direct and regular contact with a relatively small but selected number of journalists, opinion leaders. They need the information I have and I need the impact they can provide – a classical win:win networking relationship.

But today, working with the journalists is not enough. You also have to be aware of independent bloggers, and well connected network members; their number and power is growing. Even many

journalists use weblogs, blogs, or podcasts as sources of information or inspiration; not to mention the growing relevance

#### **What is the profile of a CNO?**

CNOs must have brainsworking skills. This means they have to be able to use their “networking intelligence”, their connected thinking skills, to share and create new knowledge with the goal to foster business development (which also includes personal development, creativity and innovation).

It is a person who facilitates and develops communication of all stakeholders. CNOs must have excellent people skills and entrepreneurial spirit.

#### **How does a CNO aggregate value to his/her organization?**

The CNO leads and facilitates the development of the social capital (social networks) of a company and works directly with the CEO. The facilitation of both tacit and implicit knowledge exchange, a higher level of brainsworking skills within the company, leads to higher and more efficient both individual and overall business performance. On corporate level it could mean: more turnover and less costs; more efficiency through synergy effects; easier new client acquisition / business development; better and longer client relationships; more efficient knowledge sharing & management with all stakeholders; higher intrapreneurship skills; more innovation and creativity; more positive and inspired environment; easier sharing of company values and building a sense of community; easier recruitment of high potentials; better reputation & image transfer on clients.

#### **How well does the corporate market understand the CNO position today in Europe and worldwide?**

Business today is more and more about people’s relations. The relationship a corporation has with their consumers in Europe will also influence the relationship this same corporation has with consumers in Brazil. Why? Because consumers talk to each other directly more and more, be it through weblogs, blogs, or on-line networks. This is a small world. The management far too often sees employees only as statistical data and forgets the individuals behind. We need to better understand people’s relations and realize the force behind it. We need professional networking skills.

Let me give you an example. Imagine the quite, introvert employee in the last corner office, a good worker but with no power within the corporation. And now imagine this same person is a

5.000+ contacts networker within an online network. Due to technological advancement and the development of online networks, this is possible. If we assume that each person has a social network of 500 contacts (family, friends, school friends, former colleagues,..), your employee can reach 5.000 x 500 people! Imagine the power and the potential consequences.

#### **Is CNO position getting popular in Europe and worldwide? What’s the trend?**

Yes, it is gaining importance, and I am positive we will see an exponential raise of CNO is the next 3-5 years.

I started as CNO in 2004 and at that time it sounded a bit strange. Even in November 2005 at a Vienna Hub round table on OpenBC, I was the only CNO. In January 2006, OpenBC appointed a CNO, and today the number of networks and companies relying on CNOs is growing. Exceptional networkers existed long before the internet, but the profession itself is developing only now.