



ON NETWORKING GROUPS (PART TWO)

In "On Networking Groups - Part One", I spoke briefly about the four types of networking groups. Now, let's take a look at a category of networking groups.

One category that most people are familiar with is the Chamber Of Commerce. Chambers serve a long standing role in the business community. It is a role of development and support. A Chamber Of Commerce can offer business both small and large with networking opportunities, training programs, legislative assistance and a host of other benefits. A Chamber Of Commerce can be a local, statewide, national, or international organization with separate memberships for each. If you belong to an area Chamber of Commerce, you do not belong to a state or national Chamber. Each plays their own role in the business community.

Some Chambers of Commerce take more of a role in the community to influence policy while others might focus more on business development. Most of them however have a wealth of information for the member that goes unused by most.

For example, let's say you have a business and you have a question about a city ordinance that relates to your business. Most often a Chamber of Commerce can provide you with the answer to your question. Each of them has a database of members that can often be accessed through some point. Usually computers are made available to members with databases that can be searched for information on other members.

When looking for networking opportunities within a Chamber Of Commerce, most people think only of leads groups or the common after hours. The reality is that any function hosted by a chamber of commerce holds opportunities for networking with other business owners and business leaders.

Chambers of Commerce generally have a yearly membership of several hundred dollars for an individual or company. There are various levels of membership that can be had. Most Chambers offer an executive level membership that includes exclusive meetings between a more elite level of business people. When looking for this type of prospect, you can often gain access to them by joining at this level. The problem you might have is actually paying for this level or attending the functions as they are provided.

I and many other experts on networking recommend anyone who networks to be a member of several groups. This should include a Chamber of Commerce. Keep this in mind when considering a Chamber of Commerce. If you are involved in your community in other business networking organizations like the Rotary Club, a local Merchant's association, or smaller networking group, you might want to consider joining a Chamber of Commerce in another part of town. This will make you a part of that community as well and open the doors to increased prospects and opportunities.

In any event, you should always attend a Chamber of Commerce function in any area several times and find out what types of assistance they can offer for the growth of your type of business. Do not join any group just for the sake of joining a group. Find out what types of members attend the functions that are offered to determine the amount of exposure you will have to your target prospect.

When you attend a Chamber of Commerce meeting for the first time, look for the most popular person in the room, the one who everyone seems to want to talk to and get to know them first. This way you will make faster connections to the rest of the group. Often the leaders of the group can help you to get in the mix quicker.

Look for people who do what you do and analyze their strengths and weaknesses for opportunities to build alliances with them. If they have been a member for a long time, it is likely that they have most of the business in their industry at this point in time. It is hard to compete in such circumstances, so try an alliance before you bang your head against the wall trying to compete or just giving up.

Chambers of Commerce have been around for many years and there are all types, including minority and international. Be sure to visit many before deciding which to join and your membership dollars will serve you better.

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