6 reasons why businesses should join a local chamber of commerce

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Have you ever recognized you are generally so busy working “in” your business that you’re unable to work “on” your business? So why you should you join your local chamber of commerce when the chamber might mean more time away from the office? I’d like to share with you six reasons chamber participation is not a fruitless burden on time but rather a true benefit to your business and your life.

1. Relationships

This isn’t about networking — this is about gaining friends, associates and even advocates. The people you get to know may or may not do business with you, but the social and emotional return in building meaningful, lasting relationships can be more meaningful than the financial return you seek. As you attend events, serve on committees and interact with people outside your normal routines, you will have the opportunity to interact with all types of people. This in turn will create better relationship building skills that can crossover to improve non-business aspects of your life as well.

2. Visibility

The age-old adage applies here — “out of sight, out of mind.” While many companies are looking to be seen in the cyber world and are doing a very good job of it, nothing sells your business better than being in front of people face to face. Business is so much more than simple transactions of money for goods/services with its root in relationships.

You are the business; the business is you. The client is more likely to buy when they know you are the brains behind the operation and have seen you regularly participating in non-transaction based functions. Chambers provide so many opportunities to spend time with potential friends (read: potential clients) in non-transaction based functions that you will be top of mind when they or someone they know is looking for your product/service.

3. Promotion

Chambers offer a wide-range of advertising options and sponsorship packages. A business can sponsor entire programs or events through a chamber. Beyond the paid advertising options, chambers also have ways to provide additional business promotion for free through monthly and annual awards, social media, regular newsletters and even printed materials. Amazingly, even some member businesses do not take advantage of the free marketing opportunities provided through chambers of commerce. Many chambers have weekly or monthly newsletters including “member news” sections or flyers from local businesses advertising sales, discounts or special events. (Our chamber even has an ability to provide a free landing page online for your business with any level of membership.)

Chambers are always looking for member-related news to share with the community through
their own advertising networks and social media. Chambers rarely spend money advertising the chamber as an organization; they spend on advertising opportunities that members can utilize.

**4. Community connection**

Some business leaders in large companies have expressed the feeling they’re too big or not local enough to need local chambers of commerce. One flaw in that thinking is they and their employees are very much a part of the local economy, regardless of the number of franchise locations they have in other states.

Chambers are not-for-profit organizations desired to lift the economy. They work very closely with governments to provide a representative business voice when needed. Participating in a chamber provides business with an avenue to express their legislative policy questions directly to the legislatures. Sometimes being a good “corporate citizen” means being the community partner that all the “little guys” expect you to be. If a major player in the local economy isn’t involved in discussions about the local economy, then the conversations (and potentially decisions) are missing a key point of view.

**5. Ongoing training & education**

For companies that do not have a large training budget, getting to national conferences or bringing in experts is out of the question. Chambers provide an inexpensive way to bridge the gap between no training and topic-expert training. There may not be better organizations at providing relevant speakers and guest trainers in a timely manner than chambers of commerce.

Based on member surveys and ongoing member communication, chambers can provide speakers at events or links to expert articles through emails and newsletters that members specifically request. Business leaders are essentially enrolled in a continuing education course in business management provided through the chamber — they simply need to attend.

**6. Programs and events**

Membership in a chamber of commerce provides access to all of their programs and events, which are many. As a chamber director, sometimes I feel like all I’m doing is event planning. Chamber events include business training luncheons, networking specific events, awards banquets, golf tournaments, city celebration events and many others specific to each chamber. All of these events are designed to build your business in some fashion, whether through training, promotion, networking or community service and can the perfect addition to the other methods a business employs for building their business.

Because of these six reasons, and many others, chambers are known to stimulate business-to-business commerce in the local economy. Research shows that a major part of small business typically comes from business-to-business services, so participating in local chambers of commerce as a small (or large) business is an easy way to increase local visibility, build credibility, and expand your contacts.

I must point out the importance of the word *participate*. Joining a chamber is great. A business receives many benefits visibly and behind the scenes. However, joining only gets you so far. Participating is the true key to receiving the benefits of chamber membership. It is similar to sitting in a college algebra course for an hour all the while posting to social media. You are no better off than if you didn’t attend. Only through attending events, talking to members you’ve
never met before, serving on committees, and taking advantage of the advertising opportunities presented will your membership become more than another calendar item you will avoid to create time for “more important” or “more urgent” business and truly become the benefit to your business you’ve been searching for. It’s up to you.