



HOW TO USE YOUR CHAMBER MEMBERSHIP TO GROW YOUR BUSINESS

“When consumers know that a small business is a member of the chamber of commerce, they are 49% more likely to think favorably of it at 80% more likely to purchase goods of services from the company in the future.”

- Scharipo Research 2012

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Chamber of Commerce – A Brief History

The first known Chamber of Commerce was recorded in 1599 in Marseille, France.

In those days Merchants and Businesses banded together to protect their interests against common adversarial enemies such as Crooks, Thieves, Highwaymen, Robbers, Fraudsters, Con-Men, Pirates and Government.

The New York State Chamber is the oldest Chamber of Commerce in America, formed in 1768. That makes it older than the Declaration of Independence.

While Chambers of Commerce have had a long history of building business at any cost, the last 30 to 40 years has seen Chambers become more collaborative recognizing that good healthy businesses, providing good jobs, have a direct impact on growing healthy communities and because of that – stronger economies.

In general Chamber philosophy is about “Freedom of Enterprise” and doesn’t subscribe to a political dogma but instead supports legislation, regulations and decision making that assist members to go about their business with minimum interruption.

Most Chambers of Commerce are completely autonomous, however it is fair to say that generally your local Chamber of Commerce will be interested in inspiring your business to grow and be a positive contributor to your local community.

The way that Chambers do this is to positively influence the environment in which your businesses operates. This is done by providing training, advice, information, support and the ability to speak as one voice (Advocacy).

There is strength and credibility in numbers and speaking with a combined voice – your Chamber does this on your behalf solely to assist your business grow and prosper. Government, Local Government, Agencies and other organizations proactively seek out the opinions and thoughts of Chamber members to ensure they are considered when making decisions.

Chambers are also seen as a credible source of knowledge and information for other organizations, due to our long-standing position in the community. The Chamber enjoys close relationships with industry bodies within the local and national business communities including government, institutions, other associations and the media.

Your Membership with The Mansfield Area Chamber of Commerce

ADVOCATE

The Chamber advocates pro-business policies and legislation to help businesses in the area grow and prosper.

What current areas of legislation concern you the most?

How can we best advocate for you when it comes to City, County, State and Federal issues concerning business policies?

CONNECT

The Chamber provides program and event opportunities to meet other area business people. To succeed, businesses must continually connect with new people, cultivate emerging relationships and leverage existing business.

Thinking about your business today, who do you need to connect with and why?

EDUCATE

The Chamber provides programs and opportunities to learn the inner-workings of the Mansfield Area community, develop effective leadership skills, and grow businesses through educational business programs to improve the workforce pipeline.

What educational opportunities would you like to see the Chamber provide?

Growing your Business using your Chamber of Commerce Membership

“It’s not all about you”

First let’s start with “it’s not all about you”. One of the major mistake that many entrepreneurs make – and don’t realize – is in marketing themselves, not their business. They forget that a business is not about them, it’s about serving their customers.

It’s not about who **you** are or what **you** do – it’s about your clients, customers, and potential buyers. How can you help customers be more successful? How can you solve their problems?

Networking is about relationship building, not making sales pitches where you force others to listen to you drone on excitedly about yourself.

The two most important networking skills you can develop are listening and asking questions. These two skills will impress your clients even more than your best business statistics.

Why? Because listening validates the value of others and shows respect. Talking too much is rude, dominating, and not reciprocal. Asking thoughtful questions shows sincerity and builds trust because it actively shows an interest in someone's opinions and thoughts.

We have found that as you begin to use your membership and attend events, the most successful are those who fully understand this creed.

There are numerous ways you can use your Chamber membership to grow your business. Like most strategies and tactics, these can be rolled out gradually and without the need to invest in huge financial resources. There is plenty of information below – all good tactics to help you leverage. But the single most important strategy – have a plan of attack and consider looking at one activity per month and be consistent.

It takes time for people to remember you, your name, your company name and just what you do. Expect that, accept and work it!

Networking Opportunities & Referrals Strategy

Your Chamber offers plenty of opportunities to network with other business people.

Business Unplugged

Business Unplugged is a mixer designed for sophisticated individuals with like minds who will all unplug from their Social Networks to get some Face to Face Networking done. In a world of technology let's revisit the days when people went out to make friends and new business connections.

This event is for you if you like to meet new people, interact in a professional business setting, network with other like-minded folks, or just want to get out of the house and have a good time!

There is always free food, drinks, music, and often times door prizes.

Mansfield Connects

The overall objective is to provide a means where local business owners can gain new skills, support their business goals and realize a return on investment by participating in this group.

Whether starting, growing or expanding a business, we will explore a wide variety of topics based on running a profitable business.

All education is geared towards anyone in business no matter if you're selling paperclips or airplanes!

Mastermind Groups

Napoleon Hill said, *"No two minds ever come together without thereby creating a third, invisible intangible force, which may be likened to a third mind"*.

A mastermind group is simply a meeting of highly motivated folks who share a common goal and are looking to encourage and help each other improve. We raise the bar by challenging each other to create and implement goals, brainstorm ideas, and support each other with total honesty, respect and compassion. Mastermind participants act as catalysts for growth, devil's advocates and supportive colleagues.

Chamber Business Luncheons

Our luncheons are once per quarter on the third Thursday. Each luncheon has a topic.

January – The Mayor's "State of the City" address

April – A Candidate Forum

July – A Community Event

October – The "State of Education" by our Mansfield I.S.D Superintendent

Action Plan – Networking / Referrals

Many Chamber members take the opportunity to informally create referral networks with others they meet at Chamber events. This way they can be on the lookout for business to refer to other members. This is a great way of obtaining referrals in return.

- ✓ Check Dates for upcoming events

- ✓ Put these in your calendar
- ✓ Don't forget to RSVP or register
- ✓ Check the Chamber members on the web page and take note of any that you may want to meet
- ✓ Ensure you have a supply of business cards
- ✓ Hone your intro for the event – what do you do but more importantly why do you do it?
- ✓ Arrive early and if you don't particularly care to “work a room”, stand at the entrance, you'll be sure to meet everyone who attends
- ✓ Best questions when you meet other members, how can I help you?
- ✓ Follow up the next day with any people you met, and remember, it's not about you, how can you help them

Community Visibility Strategy

The Chamber of Commerce is a globally respected brand. Consumers and businesses tend to prefer to deal with businesses that are members of a local Chamber of Commerce. Once you've joined the Chamber, there are several ways to ensure that you can let everyone know you've joined.

Let everyone know you've joined your local Chamber

Upon joining, take the opportunity to let all customers, suppliers, prospective customers and others know you are supporting your local economy by joining the Chamber. A simple email blast should do it.

Ribbon Cutting

“A first impression is the last impression”

Your Ribbon Cutting is your introduction to the Mansfield Community. It's your opportunity to tell everyone what you do, why you do it and how you differentiate yourself from your competitors. It's also a way to increase your visibility. The Chamber schedules these events 30 days out to promote.

A couple of things to keep mind:

- date and time are very important,
- remember people will be leaving their work to attend,
- spread the word,
- send reminders,
- plan a memorable event in coordination with the Chamber.

Membership Directory

We offer a membership directory in several ways; digital display in the lobby of the Chamber office, on our website, and in our printed Community Resource Guide – make use of it. Not only is it a handy place for people to find you but being online will offer a high-quality link back to your website. This link is important for placing your business higher on search engines. It is important to keep your company information, keywords, and description updated for our directory through your online profile.

Chamber Seal

Align your business with the Chamber by making sure you take every opportunity to display your membership alliance at your premises, on stationery, emails and websites. Use the opportunity to let absolutely everyone you deal with know you are member.

Community Visibility Leadership Strategy

“Do Good to Make Good” is the philosophy that helps center many businesses. It has been proven time and time again that a business helping the community benefits the business and the community. Business owners who get this know that being a vital part of the world outside the office walls is not only rewarding philosophically, but also identifies the company as a good corporate citizen – a fact that can have a positive effect on the company’s success.

Sign up to volunteer with the Chamber. We’ve partnered with our local community organizations and school district. When we hear about an opportunity we pass it on!

Advocacy – Drive an Issue

Do you have an interest in how Government could assist the Chamber to drive projects or remove obstacles that impede Chamber members from growing? Take the opportunity to raise and drive an issue. Check with the advocacy committee, they may be working now on your issue or take the opportunity to “own” a project and become a leader.

Action Points – Community Visibility

- ✓ Organize your Member Profile on our website – this ties into our directory and our app
- ✓ Frame your membership Certificate and put in a public space at your business premises

- ✓ Download the digital seal “member of” – attach to your email signature, website, communications
- ✓ Let your Clients, Suppliers, and other contacts know you have become a member of the local Chamber and invite one of them to come along to the next event as your guest
- ✓ Make meetings and complete any projects that take your interest

Targeted Communications to Members – Strategy

The Chamber Blog

The Chamber has a blog. The content is geared towards local business news, events and issues. Share insights, maximize your company’s exposure, expand your brand and get your voice heard.

If you are an expert in an area that may be of value to other members, you can “pitch” a blog for publication. Content should be informative and engaging. We want our blog to spark engagement between our writers and Chamber members.

Advertising

You can advertise in several ways

- Our weekly newsletter
- Website Category Banner Ad
- On our directory display in the Chamber lobby
- In our Community Resource Guide
- In our Video intro on our website

Action Points – Targeted Communications

- ✓ Advertising should be a 12-month plan
- ✓ Tie advertising in with your marketing plan
- ✓ Check to see whether the news editor will accept “business interest” stories

Events & Promotions Strategies

Golf Tournament, Business Expo, Business Awards and Special Events

The Chamber of Commerce is the world's leading networking association. Because of this your local Chamber will usually offer very beneficial events and promotional activities. Members make use of these to network, profile their business and help other members. Some of these events have a set format such as Chamber Luncheons or Awards Ceremonies. There is real value just by attending some of these events, however you may be able to make some of the following work for you as well.

Business Unplugged

Can you host? This is a service you can buy as a member. You provide the premises and refreshments and you get to exclusively profile your business with an engaged audience. These are extremely good at building your profile within your local community.

Promotional Event

Often used in conjunction with local media and a "launch" type event. You may be opening a new location, launching a new product, announcing an acquisition - these are all good reasons to work with your Chamber to hold a one-off gathering.

Collaboration Opportunities

Once you get to know other members, you may be able to identify opportunities where one or more businesses may be able to get together and hold a one-off event. Once again check with your Chamber. There are usually reasonable event management type charges with this type of service, but these can be very effective in profiling and raising awareness of your offering.

Action Points – Events and Promotions

- ✓ Check upcoming event dates and any vacancies (These are usually booked well in advance)
- ✓ Does your business have a launch opportunity / opening on the horizon – check with your local Chamber about dates and type of event. Also discuss with media partners the Chamber has relationships with – they can sometimes offer excellent packages

- ✓ Identify other businesses that may be able to co-host an event

Special Deals

Your membership comes with great cost saving benefits. There are several deals you can enjoy from local businesses.

Your Offer

You may be able to offer a deal as well and tie this into your marketing and sales activity. Make sure any deal you offer is exclusive to members only. Use the offer as a way of beginning a relationship with another member.

Action Points – Special Deals

- ✓ Think about an offer that is not currently being met by your competition
- ✓ Talk to your Chamber about offering this. We may be able to add this to your listing on the members' directory or even on our website for offers.
- ✓ Think about how you are going to proactively promote the offer and work into your marketing activity
- ✓ Book any advertising
- ✓ Start contacting other members with details of your offer

Digital/Social Media

You must be present AND accurate on Google, Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn. The Mansfield community is on Facebook! And at the Chamber, we have a very active Facebook page. We're constantly taking pictures of our members, posting and tagging – all to give you exposure!

Make sure to “Like” our page – then share and comment on our posts – all of this increases your visibility.

Business Support Hubs/Training/Information

Your Chamber is often the first stop when looking for advice, information or ways to be better at the “business” of business. Check your local Chamber’s newsletters for training opportunities, other members who are experts in business matters (Lawyers, Accountants, Consultants, Marketing Experts, Business Productivity Experts)

Training

All businesses can benefit from a regular dose of upskilling, informational updates and training. The return on investment will usually far outweigh any cost. Seek out these events. Some of the smaller Chambers may have limited offerings, however they are usually connected to some of the larger Chamber offerings and you are often able to take advantage of these at preferential rates.

Action Points – Training & Upskilling

- ✓ Identify which areas you need assistance with
- ✓ Talk to the Chamber about any upcoming training
- ✓ Ask for referrals to any local experts who are members that may be able to assist your business
- ✓ Don’t forget to ask others how you can help them!

Advisory Board

Our Advisory Board is comprised of successful, business leaders in the Mansfield Community with specific skill sets, knowledge and experience. They can talk with you from starting up and innovating to growing your business, we’ve got you covered. As a Chamber member you have the opportunity to pick up the phone or send an email to access expert advice.

Be a part of something bigger!

As the voice of business, we are constantly striving to make the Mansfield Area the best place to start and grow your business.

Summary – Leveraging Your Chamber Membership

Being thorough about your marketing activity, making a deliberate decision to work with your Chamber and acting on these strategies above will see your business grow its local profile, obtain more referrals, grow sales, get better at what you do and hopefully grow a committed and loyal customer base.

Independent Research – Summary of Findings

In 2012 the Schapiro Group commissioned research on the value of Chamber membership.

“When consumers know that a small business is a member of the Chamber of Commerce, they are 49% more likely to think favorably of it and 80% more likely to purchase goods or services from the company in the future”

“Most consumers (59%) think that being active in the local Chamber of Commerce is an effective business strategy overall. It is 29% more effective, however, for communicating to consumer that a company uses good business practices and 26% more effective for communicating that a business is reputable”.

“If a company shows that it is highly involved in its local Chamber (e.g., sits on the Chamber Board), consumers are 12% more likely to think that its products stack up better against its competition.”

“When a consumer thinks that a company’s products stack up better against the competition because the company is highly involved in its local Chamber of Commerce, it is because he or she infers that the company is trustworthy, involved in the community, and is an industry leader.”