

The Chamber Executive Network

SELLING Chamber memberships in tough times!



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Innovative management, membership and project ideas for progressive Chambers

September, 2011

Chamber Tech

'Bump' instead of business cards at BAH?

Our Chamber contacts say some of their members are using the Bump app for iPhones and Androids to exchange contact information instead of business cards. For people who download the free app at <http://bu.mp>, you simply touch two phones together to easily share your business info, photos, music or whatever. Ah ... the new world!

National 3/50 Project launches new shop-local iPhone app

The folks at www.the350project.net started urging people two years ago to pick three local "Mom & Pop" stores they liked and spend \$50 a month to help keep them in business. Now they have LookLocal, a free download for iPhone users which will locate nearby "independent, brick and mortar" merchants using the project's national database of 23,000 listings. Founder Cinda Baxter tells the CEN she has a solid relationship with Chambers with 538 registered on her site as supporters. She adds that as she speaks around the country on this project, 85 percent of those engagements are Chamber-driven.



SENIOR SAINTS HALL OF FAME

This project nets community pride, great Chamber PR and cash in bank

Dear Subscriber,

If your Chamber is looking for a solid event that will please both your community and the Chamber treasury, consider this Senior Saints Hall of Fame banquet now in its 14th year at Jefferson County (Illinois) Chamber.

Overview: This Chamber picks 12 deserving local senior citizens each year, honors them properly with publicity and an emotional, well-executed banquet, then places their group photo on a Hall of Fame wall at a community center for posterity.



Besides honoring respected older folks, this event returns huge Chamber PR dividends, plus nets more than \$10,000 for the general fund.

Exec Brandon Bullard thinks it is one of his Chamber's most rewarding projects.

"People sometimes go their whole life doing things behind the scenes that nobody knows about," he says. "We feel as a Chamber, it is our honor – actually, our responsibility – to tell the public about them. At 32, I'm fairly young and I think it is important for people of my generation to recognize what great community role models these people are."

Here are details helpful to replicate this project:

■ **Collecting good nominations.** A simple public news release and notices to Chamber members several weeks prior to the program usually produces 20 or more nominees from the public. Bullard gets a three-person committee from out of the county to rate and score the nominations to pare

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the group to 12 inductees.

Anyone can nominate any county resident 65 years or older, however the Chamber requires three letters of support for each candidate. Criteria include community service, demonstrated love of country or community, ability to embrace change and response to adversity. Winners are then assembled at the Chamber office for a presentation to the press and the announcement of the banquet date.

■ **Inductees form a diverse group.** For example, one might be a well-known former insurance adjuster with nearly six decades of service in local government who later developed and operated a



successful marina. The next honoree might be a demure little old farm lady who holds the county record for blood donation over the past 50 years. "It's neat to go through all the winners and see the people who shaped our community," Bullard says.

This photo shows the

presentation to retired school teacher and outstanding community volunteer Judi York (right) last year.

■ **At the banquet, visuals are vital.** Bullard serves as MC and after he reads a brief bio and announces the name of each new inductee, a big screen slide show of their family, business or service photos begins, followed by a video in which they are interviewed about their memories by Bullard's assistant. "The videos are a big hit," says the exec. "We ask them to talk about their accomplishments they are most proud of, their funniest moments, advice they would give young people today and to name the people who influenced them the most -- things like that. We give them a chance to say something at the microphone later, but the videos work much better."

Following the video the honoree makes their way to the stage to receive their awards – a certificate from the Chamber, a pin from the county board chairman, a medal from the mayor and a proclamation from state elected officials or other dignitaries present. The group photo is taken after the banquet.

■ **Friends, family drive the program.** More than 300 people attended last year's banquet. Some businesses will purchase a table for ten to support a cherished former employee or boss. Some inductees will have 30 family members from grandchildren on up who want to witness their honor. Ticket prices for the banquet are usually \$40 per couple, plus table sponsorships are sold for \$500 and \$1,000.

"No matter how you move things along, it takes a while to honor a dozen people in this way," says Bullard. "But to see the look in their eyes and on the faces of their families and friends makes it totally worth it." [618-242-5725] chamberexec@mvn.net

Chamber Quick Tips

■ **Plan Chamber golf day and night!**

They have a lot of fun at the annual Huntsville-Walker County (Texas) Chamber's Shot in the Dark golf tournament. You play nine holes in daylight and if that isn't hard enough, you play another nine holes at night wearing glowing necklaces and hitting glowing golf balls.



"We try to schedule it for a full moon so we can provide some kind of light out on the course," says Laura Green, the Chamber's events manager. Between the daylight and nighttime rounds, 600 numbered balls are dropped from a helicopter with the ones landing closest to a target producing prizes for their purchasers. Green says the whole thing is pretty exciting, plus the tournament usually nets the Chamber \$15,000. This year, 32 foursomes participated. [936-295-8113] lgreen@chamber.huntsville.tx.us

■ **Build your BAH numbers.** Membership Services Director Nancy Morgan of Olean (New York) Chamber averages a crowd of 90+ at the ten Business After Hours events held each year. How does she do it? Effective organization – The ten BAHs are planned and announced in advance each year, with specific details and attractions of each event re-publicized as they occur. She has a waiting list of hosts. Great food – Morgan says members enter BAH with the idea of "What's to eat?" and "Who's to meet?" – sometimes in that order. Hosts publish and promote their exotic menus in advance. Popular prizes. Hosts provide a door prize, plus a 50/50 raffle gives members something to hope for. The Chamber also signs a \$25 "attendance fund sponsor" for each BAH, which results in a drawing for a \$250 Chamber gift certificate at the end of the year. The catch is, members must attend seven of the ten BAHs to be eligible for this drawing, another incentive to show up! [716-372-4433] nancy@oleanny.com

■ **Find a unique celebrity speaker.**

Holly Hoffman, who placed fourth in Season 21 Survivor Nicaragua, headlined the Chamber's recent Membership Appreciation Event in Watertown, South Dakota and was well-received. Do you have a major TV show contestant with ties to your state? [605-886-5814] somer@watertownsd.com

Seven ways to land more Chamber sponsors

Chamber execs tell us sponsorships are tough to find in these days of volatile markets and severe expense-monitoring by corporations. Here are our suggestions on boosting sponsorship sales:

- 1. Widen your circle of prospects.** If your banks or other large supporters are burned out, make a targeted pitch to smaller businesses. Your dry cleaner or nail salon owner might surprise you and be ready to make a big splash on occasion. Also, President Jennifer Trammell of Greater Shelby County (Alabama) Chamber was able to widen her Chamber's prospect base by splitting one large sponsorship into several smaller ones to "share the love."
- 2. Survey past sponsors** and ask what appeals to them in terms of sponsorship benefits. Then revamp your benefits to target their changing needs, always making sure to provide good value for what you are charging.
- 3. Energize your sponsorship marketing.** Do you have well-designed, easy to read materials both in print and online? Is the material getting into the right hands? Do you provide effective training for those who are selling sponsorships to your members face to face?
- 4. Make being a sponsor a bigger deal** than before. Bigger banners. More listings in more publications and locations. More perks like waived fees, premium seating, spotlight introductions, newsletter profiles and other exceptional recognition. Let members know the value has improved.
- 5. Think like a sponsor.** Few companies give away their money these days. They want to help the Chamber, but they need to justify the expense and they want to see the numbers. That means you need facts in hand on your sales call – like readership statistics, projected crowd size, website hits, potential media coverage, email marketing planned and social media recognition.
- 6. If all else fails, drop the price of sponsorships at all levels** by ten percent and announce it to your membership with fanfare. Tell members you recognize times are tough and you want to help them save money, but still promote their businesses. The idea of a bargain appeals these days and you might be able to make up the ten percent with extra sales.



7. Make sure events are 'sponsor worthy'

Clever, creative, well-executed events entice sponsors. A good example is the Canton (Michigan) Chamber's Grub Crawl (logo above) which draws up to 500 participants who pay \$35 each to be shuttled in busses to sample food and drinks at a dozen area restaurants. Exec Tracey Rettig has no trouble finding nearly 40 T-shirt sponsors at \$125 each for this event, because the T-shirt is the "ticket" and sponsors know 500 people will wear their names that night and beyond. "What's fun is you've got a sea of color," says Rettig, who adds that low overhead gives the "crawl" a 70-80 percent profit margin. She tweaks the event to keep it fresh. New this year was a dessert shop stop, plus an "after hours" restaurant where participants could unwind at the end of the night.

Liven your Chamber website – take a cue from Durango! Here at the CEN we examine so many Chamber websites they sometimes all blur together. Then along comes Durango (Colorado) Chamber with enough movement and great photography and interesting features to get the blood flowing again. For starters, the home page rotating photos offer an appealing look at mountain life and fun here. Then below and to the right you are drawn to a rotating ad box which Chamber Manager Rita Simon says has become a nice profit center. Icons link you to more interesting pages inside, including a Sustainable Durango page which tells you where to recycle your athletic shoes or find a home composting bin. Chamber Chats presents an array of radio interviews with Chamber members. A clever "Girls Gone Wild Golfing" page is one of many photo gallery options depicting Chamber events. And at the bottom of the home page you can view the latest winner of the Chamber's popular "I Love Durango" video contest where compiling a cool 90-



second creative commercial for the town can win you an even cooler \$500 and applause at the annual banquet. Simon says the new site was launched a year ago, but underwent major tweaking two months ago to give it fresh energy. What are you waiting for? Check it out at www.durangobusiness.org.

Chamber home pages we like ...

■ **Fruita, Colorado.** Word-based graphics springing from home page photos introduce you to Fruita in an interesting and flattering way at www.fruitachamber.org.

■ **Miami, Oklahoma.** A shooting-star theme brings you panning photos of the positive amenities of this community at www.miamiokchamber.com.

■ **Bay Harbor Islands.** This is actually a Florida "town" website promoting a small section of metro Miami in a very clever way. What appear to be "lense" graphics offer a fluid, waterfront movement to the home page at www.bayharborislands.org.

Editor's Notebook:

Ask and you shall receive ... maybe! Park Ridge (Illinois) Chamber exec Gail Haller keeps a sharp eye out for "free stuff." She recently scored the exquisite bottle of Buffalo Trace bourbon she displays here in a fancy wooden box for an upcoming community foundation auction. She just applied to the company when she learned it was giving away 174 rare bottles to charities. "I hope it goes for \$1,000," she says. The bottle is No. 44 and she already has a bid of \$500 for it. Haller also landed sports memorabilia such as an autographed Chicago Bears football and a White Sox baseball, just by making a connection with Illinois sports teams foundations.



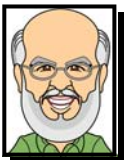
The exec says such sources are

"not quite as generous" to Chambers as they are to 501(c)3 organizations, but stresses that it never hurts to apply. "You'd be amazed as to what is out there," she says. *[Sorry, subscribers, but we checked and the bourbon bottles are now all spoken for.]*

Speaking of sponsors — do you have one for your upcoming board retreat?

Chamber board retreats aren't cheap, as President Bruce Partain of Nacogdoches County (Texas) Chamber pointed out to us last month. He figures expenses were about \$1,000 for his fairly simple, one-day July retreat which involved 40 people — and that did not include paying a facilitator. Expenses included the cost of a facility, breakfast and lunch, snacks and coffee, miscellaneous supplies, plus the preparation of comprehensive three-ring binders to hold bylaws, minutes and other board materials. Collecting \$500 from a sponsor helped — the local Ford dealer. In return, the dealer got top billing on retreat materials and signage, recognition on the Chamber website and e-newsletter, a mention in emails to retreat participants and a personal introduction at the retreat. "He could have displayed a new Ford at the site as well if he wanted to," Partain says. Many Chambers ask participants to pay their own retreat expenses, or simply fund it from the Chamber treasury. A sponsorship sounds like a better alternative.

Horn-tooting doesn't hurt. Subscribers who are featured in this newsletter should let their members know about it. After all, it means you are doing something right when we think your project, tip or technique is worthy of passing along to Chambers nationwide and in Canada. Art Secondo of Southington (Connecticut) Chamber is a good example. When his annual spring "walk through" of downtown with city officials was the lead story in our June special report,



Hakes

he made copies of the entire two-page report and inserted them in his monthly newsletter for his members to read.

Cheers!

Dick Hakes, Editor/Publisher
hakesd@iw.net

Next Month...

■ **Shop Local Campaigns**
Every Chamber is doing them now, but we tell you what's new, what's innovative and what works!

■ **Correction** — We apologize if you attempted to email President Helen Mayle of Pickerington (Ohio) Chamber after reading our July story about her leadership class project to raise money to help defer student activity fee costs. We goofed on the Chamber's name and address. You can contact Helen at president@pickeringtonchamber.com.

Yes, recruiting can be fun



Make sure volunteers are properly fired up to recruit!

This enthusiastic group of Springfield Area (Missouri) Chamber volunteers found themselves hugging each other, holding hands and doing pushups and chest bumps as part of a “fire-up” meeting for the Chamber’s big membership drive last month.

Professional recruiter Jimmy Cusano of the Texas-based firm called Your Chamber Connection believes creating a “non-boring” campaign where volunteers can have fun and still be effective in landing new Chamber members is more important now than ever.

Cusano patrols these meetings in a red zoot suit and encourages costumes, humor and camaraderie as he unleashes competitive teams of recruiters into the business community.

Membership VP Brent McCoy says his 1,800-member Chamber hopes to bring in 200 new faces through this campaign.

THE WORD FROM THE TRENCHES:

14 tips on how to sell Chamber memberships in tough times!

Dear Subscriber,

As economic challenges for businesses and Chambers drag on, maintaining a strong membership base is more important than ever. This month, we asked for expertise from our Chamber contacts on how to sell memberships in tough times. Enjoy these two pages of tips, techniques and programs – from working execs!



Engage your prospect, then sell the Chamber

Sell yourself first, Chamber second. Engage the decision maker in a friendly, honest conversation about his or her business. Reveal your own pride in the community and your positive perspectives. Keep it real – no fluff or bull.

Don’t talk “Chamber lingo.” Keep it simple, talk in their terms and don’t overwhelm them with information. Instead of talking networking, sponsorships and events, tell them “you’ll have 21 opportunities this year to meet face-to-face and shake hands with 300 professionals in our community who are potential customers.” These days, new customers are like gold. Stress the message that Chamber membership equals opportunities to reach them.

Focus on insider concept. Convey that Chamber membership is comprised of the movers, shakers, thinkers and doers of the business community. They do business with each other because they understand the need for economic growth and vitality in the community.

Never be negative on anything. Very important! Don’t be critical of sports, the weather or even the lighting in the room. Never talk politics or religion.

■ From Doug Keeter, Membership Director, Pittsburgh Airport Area (Pennsylvania) Chamber



Convince prospects you can help turn their business around

Don’t sell. Offer opportunities. Approach a prospect with confidence and a smile and simply spell out exactly what the Chamber can offer them and how it can improve their bottom line during these difficult times.

Go in as a "blank sheet." Shed any preconceived notions you may have about your prospect, their business health or their attitude toward the Chamber. That puts you in a better position to make your best pitch.

Be a reporter. Ask specific and intelligent questions about their business. One thing that seems to turn off the prospect is asking the generic "how's business" or asking if they are familiar with the Chamber. Instead, ask them what they think is their most effective way to generate new business. If the business has dropped its Chamber membership, ask what was the one thing they were not getting from the Chamber which made them quit. Then focus your presentation accordingly.

Carry effective materials. The most important would be a membership benefits flyer which you can leave with the prospect after the call. Our Chamber has ten specific benefits for new members only, ranging from free advertising to free breakfasts and totaling more than \$500. We tell them this will boost their business in the first three months of their membership. However, we try not to leave too much material. If they are busy, just leave your business card and arrange for a better time to contact them.

■ *From Sandy Goldstein, Membership Director,
Camarillo (California) Chamber*

More ways to close membership sales ...

"Work with" your high-level firms. Like many Chambers, Durango (Colorado) Chamber offers benefit packages for high-level memberships, which in this Chamber top out at \$10,000. "We have learned that we need to be flexible with what we offer these members because 'one size fits all' really doesn't apply any more," says Chamber Manager Rita Simon. For example, a health care firm was more interested in a color ad in the Chamber directory than BAH or other event passes for its employees, which the Chamber gladly swapped dollar for dollar. Likewise, an educational member requested an internship program in lieu of other perks in its package. "In this economy, you've almost got to do it," says Simon, "and if it's what these membership prospects want, we can oblige them."

Offer prospects the mentoring they seek. More Chambers are organizing mentoring programs within the Chamber to entice prospects and help existing members in hard times. Examples: ■ Through a **New Member Outreach** at Gresham Area (Oregon) Chamber, members of the Chamber's Resource Team personally call on new members to provide guidance and support. They introduce them at events and help them with a tabletop expo which showcases new members every six months. ■ Likewise The Chamber of Commerce of Hawaii recently launched a **Young Professional Mentorship Program** to serve its new YPN group formed last year. Senior business leaders and board members will provide guidance and share business experiences with young professionals for a six-month period.

Show them the money!

Offer real discount programs

Today, you must hone in on what yields the best ROI for members. We recently rolled out a new credit/debit card service through a local company (www.totalmerchantservices.com) that saves our members about 25 percent on their monthly credit/debit processing services. Each participating business receives a hand-held wireless unit that links to internet-based software, all of which is provided to them at no cost. We look at this program as kind of the "golden handcuffs" or clincher that is going to bring in members, because they can only get this discount by being a Chamber member. We also offer discounted insurance programs in health, worker's compensation and general business insurance. In tough times, these are programs members care about the most.



■ *Catherine Glover, President/CEO,
Albany Area (Georgia) Chamber*

Free gets their attention

In just three months, our new Drive by at Five informal networking event on the second Tuesday of each month has grown from 20 to 70 participants. We advertise it through print and online media and hang a big banner outside. Some people pop in for five minutes, some stay for two hours. It's very casual – just drinks and a light snack in the Chamber lobby. We invite members and non-members and each new face that shows up gets two minutes to tell about their business. Informal sponsors pay for the refreshments. We think the key attraction of this program for today's business person is that it is free, casual, easy to attend and does not waste anybody's time. Our board and other members invite prospects and we are actually gaining members from this already.

■ *Jennifer Palmer, President,
Albertville (Alabama) Chamber*