



CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Working with the Chamber of Commerce is an excellent way to get your business off the ground. The Chamber provides a great networking opportunity to develop referral relationships with other service businesses. Additionally, a majority of the members have businesses and homes that need their windows cleaned (often you will be the only window cleaning company in the chamber).

Goals:

- The ideal relationship is as a vendor.
- Provide them an estimate on their business and home.
- Look for other contractors to partner with.

Your local Chamber of Commerce can be an amazing resource for education, networking, and customer acquisition, if you make the most of what is offered.

Joining your local Chamber of Commerce has long been recommended for small businesses, particularly those who serve local markets with their products or services. In a [recent discussion on OPEN Forum](#), members discussed some of the limitations as well as the best ways to get value from your local Chamber of Commerce.

Working with Chambers

Working with or becoming involved with a Chamber of Commerce is one way to raise the professional appearance and reputation of your business. By becoming involved in a Chamber of Commerce, you will meet other local business owners. By becoming involved, you will become known as *local business owner* and not merely a window cleaner. However, just joining a chamber will not drive business your way. It is going to take some effort on your part.

In order for a chamber membership to be effective you *must* become active in the chamber. You can do this by attending events such as business after hours, advertising and sponsoring events or by volunteering or a combination of all of the above.

A chamber will take as many of your advertising dollars as you want to give them so pick your spots wisely. For example, instead of placing an advertisement in the golf program, donate the Fish Window Cleaning shopping bags in which they put giveaways for all of the golfers. Now you have over 100 golfers walking around with and taking home Fish Window Cleaning shopping bags. (And if they have money for golf, they probably have the money to have their windows cleaned.)



Volunteer for something you enjoy doing. Work on the golf committee, the expo committee, or the holiday party committee. As much as a chamber likes to have your money, they equally value your time. *They need volunteers* and you will get to know other business owners!

Take it one step further and get yourself on the Board of Directors. If you do, again, you will get to know other business owners and you will start to be known as a business leader in your community.

It is important to remember that a chamber membership is like a gym membership. If you do not use it will not get anything out of it. If you buy a gym membership, but you never go to the gym, you will not get in shape. If you join a chamber and you never attend any events, you will not become known in your community.

A Main Local Resource

- “I see chambers, first and foremost, as educational and training centers for businesses in the community,” says Zev Asch, president and CEO of Ledaza, a sales and marketing consulting agency for small businesses based in Melville, New York. Chambers of Commerce often sponsor events offered to members at a discount, such as seminars run by experts in sales and marketing, Microsoft Excel, or other niche topics relevant to many business owners.
- As a member, you also have the opportunity to present seminars if you have something relevant to offer other members. Erroin Martin, business advocate for Von Gehr Consulting Group, belongs to two local Chambers of Commerce. “Both chambers have helped me grow my business through networking groups, speaking engagements, and through the volunteering I have done for them,” Martin says.
- Offer your speaking services for an upcoming event or suggest a workshop that you’re qualified to lead. “These are a great way to build visibility and credibility—especially if your chamber has a series or programs reaching your specific target audience,” explains Michael Montgomery, a fundraising and economic development consultant with his own firm, Montgomery Consulting.

Get Your Name Out There

- “Service on chamber committees and/or the board can also help you build stature in your community,” Montgomery suggests. Those networking connections can lead to referrals and potential partnerships that could take your business to the next level.



- Some chambers could focus more on offering ways to aid local businesses in branding, customer acquisition and growth. “To give real value and actually help the members, I think it's imperative to provide information and resources that teach them how to attract customers in the real world. Get people who know how to generate qualified leads, convert them and repeat the process at-will to come in and show them how to work on their business, not in it,” says Jeff Motter, CEO and Chief Marketing Officer of [East Bay Marketing Group](#).
- Pinaki Saha, CEO and owner of [Anshar Labs](#), a mobile and social application-development company, agrees that “chambers must help the business to sell, grow and find customers in the community. And that can only happen if you are dialed into the community through channels, social media, business relationships and best practice advising.”
- If you’re a member and you can help your local chamber enhance its benefits, offer your services. It can only lead to more exposure for your company.

Special Events

- Some chambers are already doing it right, offering targeted opportunities geared specifically to niche membership segments. The [Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce](#), for instance, regularly orchestrates events that are helpful for small, growing companies in the area, according to Michelle Lewis, owner of [Spoonable](#), a small artisan food business. Lewis says the Brooklyn Chamber hosted Brooklyn Eats, a trade show focused on the Brooklyn food manufacturer community, which led to her acquiring many new customers.
- “The chamber also hosted a Brooklyn Pavilion at the Fancy Food Show, allowing small businesses like me to have a table for \$1,500 instead of the usual \$10,000 to \$12,000 it costs to attend,” Lewis explains. “That brought Spoonable a boatload of new customers—we’re still trying to catch up—and significantly contributed to the fact that we are in 140 stores across the U.S. in just two years.”

Standard Benefits

- With the [Affordable Care Act](#) and health insurance exchanges available online, low-cost health insurance is no longer a major incentive for joining a Chamber of Commerce. Still, many time-tested Chamber of Commerce benefits are still valuable. “Most offer discounts for chamber members—discounts on printing, car rental, advertising and sometimes facility rentals are all common membership perks,” Montgomery says. He also mentions being listed in the chamber business directory, which may cost an additional fee depending on your local chamber’s policies.



The bottom line is that joining your local Chamber of Commerce is valuable—provided you take the initiative to make it work for you. And that means taking an active role and participating whenever possible. "At the end of the day, we, as members, need to ask for what we need," advises Elene Cafasso of Enerpace. "We need to get involved and provide suggestions."

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More Ways To Get More Out Of Your Chamber Of Commerce Membership

There are many reasons to join your local Chamber of Commerce. Some of the obvious ones are networking opportunities, community involvement, and the trust that chamber affiliation builds with your customers. Of course, there are many more benefits you receive from becoming a chamber member, but many people don't fully enjoy them. They wrongly assume that by simply paying their annual membership dues, lots of new business and friends will automatically show up. Without understanding how to make their chamber experience work for them they give up on the chamber in frustration.

I've been a member of many Chambers of Commerce over the years and even served on several of their committees. That experience has given me the advantage of having talked to hundreds of chamber members about their experience. Some people have felt the chamber didn't benefit them at all, while others claim it allowed their business to grow exponentially. How can two members of the same organization have two very different experiences? The answer is that you get out of the chamber what you put into it.

If all you do is pay your membership fee you will get a welcome letter and a nice sticker to put on your front door. However, if you invest in building trusting, professional relationships with others through the chamber, the rewards in leads, sales, and friendships are potentially game changing for your business. Here are several ways to get more out of the Chamber by investing in other members.

Sign up for their newsletters or updates.	A great way to learn more about your peers at the chamber and how you can support their business is to sign up for their company newsletter, e-zine, or weekly email.
Support them online.	Support other chamber members through any of the social media outlets they use and tell your network about them as well. Have you experienced their service or product first hand? Show your support by writing positive product reviews online.



Submit their news to other groups you are part of.	Be sure to share your chamber peers' news with other groups you may be part of. Think about professional, LinkedIn, or civic groups for example.
Invite them to be part of your seminars.	Invite fellow chamber members to come speak at your company functions or the business seminars you are hosting. They will appreciate the opportunity to showcase their area of expertise and you will enhance your event with guest speakers.
Share or trade skills and expertise.	We are all experts at something. What is your "something"? Share that something with someone else at the chamber. If you are good at writing ad copy and someone else is good at printing sales flyers then offer to share skills. You will probably help each attract more business this way.
Introduce them to your friends.	Be the first person to approach new chamber members when they arrive. Be friendly and introduce them to others in the group. Your gesture will be remembered and appreciated forever.
Bring them to other functions.	Perhaps you are member of other organizations in addition to the chamber. Invite one or two of your chamber peers to attend other functions with you as your guest. Introduce them to your other associates. This will increase their circles of influence and you will look like a master networker.
Use their business first.	Support your fellow chamber members by giving them preference when you shop. For example, if you need replacement windows for your home and one of the window companies is a chamber member, give that company your business. Even if they cost a little more, the goodwill your business generates can be invaluable.