

# Chamber Development Strategies

Issue #48 October 2003 an idea exchange - from Joan Testa, Chamber Development Services, Inc.  
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## Editor's Corner.

### Meeting Needs

All of you are probably tired of hearing me talk about treating your Chamber like a business, a business with a product (benefits) that customers (members) will buy (or preferably, buy into) when it meets the needs of that customer.



I recently had the pleasure of participating in the ceremonies at the TAMACC conference in Ft. Worth, TX (yes, that's me, 4<sup>th</sup> from right with some of the staff and directors) where the El Paso Hispanic Chamber of Commerce was awarded the prestigious Large Chamber of the Year Award - and do they ever deserve it!

I will be honest...I had never had much exposure to any "diversity" Chambers of Commerce and never really understood how they existed. Was it just to provide some special services to the Hispanics (or Blacks, or Asians, or Women - like so many Chamber organizations do)? Do these groups just compete for members (and dollars and sponsorships etc.) with the "big Chamber...the "Anglo" Chamber ...or do they really meet their members' needs and fill a void that is not being served elsewhere?

I can't speak for all Hispanic Chambers, but let me tell you, Cindy Ramos Davidson, the president of the El Paso Hispanic Chamber is one of the most astute, hardworking chamber professionals (an institute graduate with over 20 years in the chamber business in Albuquerque and El Paso) has put together an organization that exceeds the programs many Chambers nationwide offer. Talk about an organization that has identified the needs of their market and is meeting those members' needs! The El Paso Hispanic Chamber has some of the most innovative and downright fantastic practical hands on helpers for their members - they truly help their niche market: the small business community, minority or not. I can testify to that - I am a small business, and as a woman owned, they have opened my eyes to opportunities I never knew existed.

Moral of the story: we all need to keep our eyes open to opportunity and continuously meet the needs of our community or we will not be of

value to them. I am proud to have the El Paso Hispanic Chamber as a client because they do bring value to their members and are what a Chamber should be.

Let's all look at some staggering statistics and realize we all need to look at our market and our future. According to an extensive study sponsored by Shell Oil, the Hispanic community is the fastest growing segment of the national population currently numbering 39 million - the equivalent of Canada, or put another way, a country within the country with buying power in Texas alone of \$94 billion. By 2007, these numbers will grow to a population of 50 million and \$139 billion of buying power in Texas alone. How about business? In 1997 there were 1.3 million Hispanic business owners nationally, with growth in 2002 to 1.9 million and projections of 2.4 million by 2007. Sales and gross receipts generated by Hispanic businesses in Texas alone grew 235% in a 5 year mid 1990's period.

Is your Chamber meeting the current needs of your community - and are you planning for the future changes in the population? Let's remember, currently 40% of the membership of Hispanic Chambers are non-Hispanic businesses who are partnering with the organization which is best meeting their needs!

### Best Ideas in Membership Development

Each year at the ACCE/NAMD conference, one of the most dynamic sessions is the "60 Ideas in 60 Minutes" where chambers from across the country share some innovations - yours for the copying! Here are some of last years' favorites:

Because members were calling to get directions to many chamber events, a direct link to Yahoo Maps was added to the Chamber's weekly email to members... from Greeley Weld, CO.

The local news radio station has a one-minute chamber news spot twice a day during the morning drive time. The station sells advertising around the "Chamber Beat" to chamber members only....from Salem, OR

A local artist donates a signed and numbered print which is given as the membership plaque every year. It is a much in demand collector's piece and the original is auctioned off at the Chamber annual meeting...from Helena, MT

A 10 minute phone card is sent out with each renewal invoice. The note says "You made the right call". A verbal message is played when they use the phone card that says thank you for being a member.....from St. Paul CVB

Easy way to spot first timers (red dots) and new members (blue dots) on name badges at events. Ambassadors, board members and staff give them special attention.....from Boise, ID.

### Core Competencies

Once again I find myself quoting research done by the Western Association of Chamber Executives that was conducted last year and identified that chambers may need to change programming, improve their communications or both. They call it a new success model for chambers that will include the core competencies that a majority of businesses see as highly important:

- Creating a strong economy
- Promoting the community
- Networking and contact opportunities
- Representing the interests of business with government, and
- Political action (ballot measures and candidates)

Take a good strong look at your programming to be sure you are covering all five of the areas above, but just as important: are you communicating that to your members? All too often I see a chamber that is right on target with their program, but too few know it! A great product that sits on a shelf is good only to the shelf! Communicating will improve chamber awareness, image and relevancy....and membership.

### Bits and Pieces

As a follow up to a poem/prayer in a previous issue of this newsletter, **Cathy Burwell**, Helena MT Chamber found the following at an Irish boutique and sent it along to share:

May those that love us, love us.  
And those who do not love us,  
May God turn their hearts.  
And if He doesn't turn their hearts,  
May He turn their ankles,  
So we'll know them by their limping.

**Greater Hot Springs, AR** Chamber is amazing. With a city population of 35,000, staff of 6, they just grew their membership to 1027. How? Excellent pertinent programming, dedicated staff and a group of business leader volunteers who are completely dedicated to their organization (i.e. 12 of 12 executive committee members participated in our recent super Community Awareness Membership Recruitment and Retention campaign.) That's what I call a great Chamber!

### 2003 ACCE/NAMD Chamber Professionals Conference The Power of Partnership

Having recently merged, the American Chamber of Commerce Executives and National Association for Membership Development held their first joint national conference in Denver August 7-9, 2003. Officials tally attendance at nearly 700, and I can testify that there was representation from almost 340 chambers, large and small, from all over the U.S. and Canada. The days were packed with great speakers, loads of information filled education sessions and of course my favorite parts of the conference, the trade show and socializing/networking.

One of the highlights of each conference is the Annual Awards Banquet that recognizes and celebrates outstanding achievements in communications and in membership development. Congratulations to the exceptional chambers and individuals who have risen to the top of the profession! I am proud to have worked with many of the best, and it was a thrill for me to be with a few of them when they were awarded their trophies. As a Connecticut native, three guesses who I sat with - a small state with great chambers!



Nell Moll (Director of Membership, Opportunities & Enthusiasm) & Kathy Alagno (CEO) (Milford, CT) with Cindy Semrau (V.P., Quinnipiac, CT) with 3 of their 6 awards ranging from Award of Excellence runner-up, to two of the top 10 in national production, to Gold & Silver Lifetime Achievement-Membership Sales, and Communications Excellence Award of Merit. Terrific!