

Why Join Your Local Chamber of Commerce

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Some business owners might say their schedule is demanding enough at the moment, and the thought of adding one more activity to their busy calendar is unbearable.

So why should they try to cram time into their already hectic schedules to join and actively participate in their local chamber of commerce?

Because membership in the local chamber offers numerous benefits and keeps business owners on top of important, ever-changing issues and trends within their community and local marketplace.

Not only that, but research points out that consumers are more likely to do business with a company if it's a member of their local chamber of commerce.

According a research study by The Shapiro Group, Inc. and Market Street Services, when consumers know that a small business is a member of their local chamber of commerce, they are 44 percent more likely to think favorably of it and 63 percent more likely to purchase goods or services from the company in the future.

If you still don't think you have time to join and participate in your local chamber of commerce, consider the following:

- Most consumers (59 percent) think that being active in the local chamber of commerce is an effective business strategy overall. It's 29 percent more effective, however, for communicating to consumers that a company uses good business practices and 26 percent more effective for communicating that a business is reputable.
- If a company shows that it's highly involved in its local chamber (e.g., sits on the chamber board), consumers are 12 percent 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.
- When consumers know that a restaurant franchise is a member of the chamber of commerce, they are 40 percent more likely to eat at the franchise in the next few months.
- When consumers know that an insurance company is a member of the chamber of commerce, they are 43 percent more likely to consider buying insurance from it.

How does all that sound? If your business is a restaurant or an insurance company, isn't it fantastic to hear the news that consumers are more likely to choose your business over a competing, non-member business because you're a member of your local chamber of commerce? Are you convinced yet that you should join your local chamber if you aren't a member already?

If not, read this top 10 list of reasons why you should join your local chamber of commerce supplied by 10 local chambers across the United States.

1. **Membership brings credibility to your business.** You can increase positive perception among consumers and business owners when you're identified as a member of a chamber of commerce.
 - *Dearborn Chamber of Commerce in Michigan*
2. **Increase your visibility in the community.** As a new member of the chamber of commerce, you will be listed in the chamber newsletter, e-newsletter, on Facebook and have the opportunity to be highlighted in other chamber publications. You also can grow your business by advertising with the chamber and sponsoring events. The chamber may also promote your grand opening/ ribbon-cutting ceremony and assist with any public relations efforts.
 - *Corpus Christi Chamber of Commerce in Texas*
3. **Create networking opportunities.** Chambers have numerous committees and serving on one of them provides numerous networking opportunities as well as professional leadership development. You can build your business while promoting developments of keen interest to local businesses and the community at large.
 - *Columbia County Chamber of Commerce in Georgia*
4. **Gain a voice in government.** The local chamber takes on the tough issues and opposes new regulations, taxes, fees, assessments and costs directed at small businesses. It also helps protect the principles of free enterprise and aids businesses in being treated fairly.
 - *Yuma Chamber of Commerce in California*
5. **Make business contacts.** The chamber's most fundamental mission is to generate more business activity for the community. The chamber initiates more business-to-business commerce and more opportunities for networking and connecting local professionals than is available through most other local organizations.
 - *Spartanburg Area Chamber of Commerce in South Carolina*
6. **Receive chamber newsletters.** Newsletters provide new member information, interesting

The Impacts of Chamber Membership on Small Business				
	% Increase in Consumer Favorability	% Increase in Consumer Awareness	% Increase in Local Reputation	% Increase Likelihood of Future Patronage*
Overall	44%	51%	57%	63%
Region				
Northeast	44%	54%	34%	66%
Midwest	28%	55%	53%	49%
South	45%	43%	82%	82%
West	51%	47%	54%	56%
Age				
18-29	--	53%	62%	56%
30-39	34%	--	54%	--
40-49	54%	63%	54%	68%
50-59	44%	54%	67%	86%
60+	43%	52%	50%	61%
Income--				
Less than \$20,000	--	--	89%	--
\$20,000 to \$40,000	54%	55%	59%	64%
\$40,000 to \$60,000	33%	40%	58%	55%
\$60,000 to \$80,000	45%	50%	61%	86%
\$80,000 to \$100,000	--	69%	50%	--
More than \$100,000	49%	75%	44%	77%
Gender				
Male	49%	53%	53%	69%
Female	36%	51%	61%	63%
Leadership				
Business Decision-Makers	37%	51%	58%	59%

information about operating a local business, articles about the local community, a community calendar and details about up-and-coming chamber events, among other things.

– *Teton Valley Chamber Of Commerce in Idaho*

7. **Acquire customer referrals.** Every day, your local chamber receives calls from individuals and businesses looking for potential vendors, and chamber members typically recommend chamber members.

– *Chattanooga Area Chamber of Commerce in Tennessee*

8. **Chamber events and programs.** Chamber events and programs provide members with great opportunities to get to know new people and expand their prospect base. Chamber events are innovative and fun ways to help members meet potential customers, clients and vendors— and generate new business leads.

– *Beverly Hills Chamber of Commerce in California*

9. **Promotion and publicity.** With a chamber membership, you can reach potential clients through member exclusive advertising and opportunities for business-to-business advertising and publicity.

– *Pike County Chamber of Commerce in Illinois*

10. **Access to members-only discounts and services.** These differ from chamber to chamber. For example, the Sandy Area Chamber of Commerce in Oregon has a member-to-member discount program where a chamber member will receive \$10 off any phone or accessory purchased from the local Verizon Wireless retailer in Sandy, which is a member of the chamber.

– *Sandy Area Chamber of Commerce in Oregon*

Small businesses represent the largest segment by number of most local chamber membership rolls. Results in the research study by The Shapiro Group, Inc. and Market Street indicate the impact of local chamber membership on small businesses is very powerful. If a consumer knows a small business is a member of its local chamber, the business enjoys a 44 percent increase in its consumer favorability rating, a 51 percent increase in consumer awareness, a 57 percent increase in its local reputation and a 63 percent increase in the likelihood that consumers will patronize the business in the future.

The table shows the impacts among key demographic and geographic subgroups.

Research indicates that chamber membership stimulates business-to-business commerce in the local community. Other businesses in town are more likely to do business with you and your company if you are a member of the local chamber. Because a major part of a small business typically comes from business-to-business services, it is essential to maintain a positive standing within the local business community.

But it takes time for a business to establish its image and reputation in the community, says Dr. Craig Shoemaker, a marketing professor and the chair of the marketing department at St. Ambrose University in Davenport, Iowa. He says people like doing business with companies they like and trust, but that trust must be earned.

“The more a firm is networked with its community, the quicker and easier it is to establish a trust bond with customers,” says Dr. Shoemaker.

Prior to his time at St. Ambrose, Dr. Shoemaker owned and operated a marketing services business in Phoenix, Arizona, which was a member of the local chamber of commerce. He says chamber membership was very beneficial to him and his marketing business.

“The chamber was a great place to network and meet people who shared a common interest in serving their community and their customers,” he says.

Dr. Shoemaker says all companies face common opportunities and problems. He found the chamber-sponsored “president’s roundtable” to be quite valuable.

“In these forums, you could discuss your challenges and problems to a group of people who understood and had faced many of the same issues,” he says. “There was a comfort in knowing that your situation was not unique.”

Ready to join your local chamber, if you aren’t already? Keep in mind, however, that you can’t just be a member of the local chamber to reap the benefits of chamber membership. Paying your annual dues just isn’t enough. You must also make an investment of time and effort in chamber activities and become involved. Simply put, what you get out of chamber membership is directly relative to what you put in.

“If a firm is to gain maximum value from membership, it must be an active participant in chamber-sponsored events,” Dr. Shoemaker says. “Chambers plan events so that its members benefit. Only by participation, can a firm get maximum benefit.”