7 Networking Groups Every Small Business Owner Should Be Involved In

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There are many elements involved in growing a successful business, and getting connected to the right people is a big part of it. Building relationships can help you find new opportunities and accelerate your business growth in a way that you couldn’t have otherwise, especially if you find the right people to surround yourself with.

Most people understand the importance of networking but have no idea where to start. Or they have a skewed idea of what networking actually is. Fortunately, there are many effective and enjoyable ways to network with other business owners.

The right networking group can help you build connections and learn from like-minded individuals. If you’re looking for some ideas, here are seven networking groups to consider:

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1. Local chamber of commerce

A chamber of commerce is a local group that exists to support its members. You’ll join a chamber of commerce in your city, and the group will advocate for the business community’s needs.

Joining a chamber of commerce is a great way to meet business

owners from all different industries. Most of these groups provide resources for business owners, including networking opportunities and the chance to hear from guest speakers.

You can check the U.S. Chamber of Commerce‘s Directory to find your local branch. However, there might be a monthly or annual fee to join, so make sure to plan accordingly.

2. SCORE

If you’re looking for a business mentor, SCORE is a good resource to explore. SCORE has an extensive network of free volunteer mentors and provides workshops, webinars and information on starting a business. The organization is supported by the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA).

3. Chief

Chief is a networking group focused on supporting women in business, and its membership ranges from Fortune 500 CEOs to successful startup leaders. You don’t always know what you’ll get when you join a networking group, but Chief provides access to a vetted community of professionals.

As a member, you’ll be placed in a peer group that’s facilitated by an executive coach. Members also have access to workshops, member meetups and community groups. If you’re interested in learning more, you can apply for a membership.

4. The National Association for the Self-Employed (NASE)

The National Association for the Self-Employed (NASE) is a group for small business owners and entrepreneurs. NASE provides access to educational resources that are typically only available to larger companies.

For instance, members can receive advice on business law, healthcare and tax management. And if you need capital for your business, NASE provides small business grants and scholarships.

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5. Business Networking International (BNI)

Business Networking International (BNI) is a global networking organization with more than 10,000 chapters worldwide focusing on referral business.

When you join, you'll start building relationships with like-minded individuals and finding opportunities through referral marketing. BNI is especially useful for service-based business owners who rely heavily on referrals. If you want more information about the group, you can look for your local chapter.

6. Entrepreneurs' Organization (EO)

Entrepreneurs' Organization (EO) is a peer-to-peer networking group for entrepreneurs. EO was founded in 1987 and currently has over 17,000 members in over 60 countries. The group provides mentor relationships, online networks and local meetup opportunities.

There are two different membership options you can choose from – a local chapter or a bridge chapter. Local chapters host monthly events and forums, while bridge chapters meet quarterly. Bridge chapters, on the other hand, allow you to form regional connections and join interest-based discussions.

7. LinkedIn Groups

If you’re looking for online networking opportunities, you might consider joining a LinkedIn group. LinkedIn groups are a great way to build your network and create professional connections.

You can search for relevant groups directly from the search bar, or you can check the LinkedIn Groups Directory. Start with one or two groups in your industry, and start looking for ways to contribute.

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How to network effectively

Networking can be useful for growing your business, but only if you go into it with a strategy. Here are a few tips for networking effectively with other business owners:

- **Network online:** The easiest way to begin networking is to start online. Networking in LinkedIn groups or on Twitter is free and can be a great way to build authority in your industry.
- **Attend in-person events:** Networking online is useful, but the best way to build relationships is by meeting face-to-face. Look for relevant events in your industry, like conferences or trade shows. Show up with the goal of meeting and connecting with other professionals in your industry.
- **Keep in touch:** Anytime you meet someone at a business event, be sure to get their contact information. Having their email address and/or LinkedIn profile will make it easier to follow up with that person later.

- **Be selective:** Finally, you can’t attend every event or talk to everyone, so your focus should be on quality, not quantity. Spreading yourself too thin will only dilute your efforts, and you can make more of an impact by choosing which networking events you attend strategically.

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