

Is networking important for your business?

By Kevin Leahy
Executive Director
Clatsop Economic Development Resources

We work in very collaborative communities. Whether in Astoria on the far North Coast, south to Seaside and Cannon Beach, or across the Columbia River in Pacific or Wahkiakum counties, and all points in between.

One question we are often asked by prospective or current business owners is the importance of networking to build business or relationships.

Here are some thoughtful strategies from Dr. Sean Harry, instructor and advisor from the Portland Community College Small Business Development Center.

When I teach classes on networking one of the tools I recommend is to purposefully look into joining a networking group. The key here (as it is in all business) is purposefully. In order for your networking to be impactful on your business (rather than just a drain on time and money) is for you to enter into the networking world with intention and a goal of what you hope to get out of your participation. There are at least four reasons why you might want to join a networking group. Each of them has its own benefits.

1) To get business leads. One of the primary reasons for these groups is to share leads with each other. Be aware though that the quality of those leads is dependent upon the person who provides them. Select your group well — make sure the other folks who participate are either your customer or are working with your customers. In addition, the best way to ensure you are getting quality leads is for you to give quality leads.

2) For professional development. Attending and participating in networking groups will expose you to a variety of people from different industries other than yours. You can use the group to learn about how different people think and act. You are making connections with people outside of your current sphere of influence, and that can provide some amazing insights to others who might be a target market for you either immediately or in the future. I sometimes go to networking groups with people in human resources just to learn about what is happening regarding recruiting and hiring practices, what new laws have been introduced, what to be aware of, etc.



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3) To give back. Some groups and events are focused around helping others. Participating might get you leads and allow you to make connections with people who might provide you with leads in the future, but that is not the primary reason for attending.

4) To hang out and make friends. Being the boss/entrepreneur/business owner can be lonely. If you work from home, you might want to attend a networking group simply to be around other people. As the business owner, you sometimes need a place to share your thoughts, fears and concerns with other business owners who get it.

The best way to ensure return on investment is to be clear about what you mean by that (i.e. your goals for attending) and to make certain you are in the right group. You may have to attend several groups to be sure you have found a good fit, but when you do find it, these groups can be very beneficial.

Business organizations include the Astoria-Warrenton Area Chamber of Commerce, Seaside Chamber of Commerce, Cannon Beach Chamber of Commerce, the Astoria Downtown Historic District Association, Seaside Downtown Development Association and the corresponding chambers across the river. All of them welcome potential members to check them out, with many of the networking activities offered via Zoom or hybrid in this COVID era. As with anything, if you decide to join, you need to be actively engaged, and not sit on the sidelines

waiting for business to come your way without any effort. It is a two way street!

I had real-life experience when I opened my business in Southern California with my wife years ago after 27 years in corporate America, and as Sean commented in the fourth item above, I vividly remember joining the Santa Clarita Chamber of Commerce to network and as a place to share my thoughts, concerns and opportunities. It led to me becoming a chamber ambassador, chamber board member, many customers and helped lead me down the path of serving the business community in my current position! Plus, I made lifelong friends I keep in touch with to this day.

There are other organizations to network in, and top of mind for me is Rotary. I am a member of the Seaside Rotary Club, and love the comraderies and

friendships I have developed in my 10 years in the club. It is great networking when we have marketing announcements and I am able to share the updates of our Clatsop Economic Development Resources events, Clatsop Community College Small Business Development Center training and our Clatsop WORKS Internship programs, but most importantly is what Rotary does to give back to the local, regional and international community through philanthropic projects. So inspiring!

Rotary is just one example of an organization that serves to give back. We have many in our region!

Kevin Leahy is the executive director of Clatsop Economic Development Resources and the Clatsop Community College Small Business Development Center. Reach him at k Leahy@clatsopcc.edu or call 503-338-2402.



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Deliver business-driven economic development services to create, grow and retain Clatsop County Businesses

Our Vision

Thriving communities and quality jobs for Clatsop County residents

Clatsop Economic Development Resources is the only County-wide Economic Development Organization, and appreciates all the private and public sector members who financially support our efforts.

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