



## CHAMBER TRENDS

### 1. Membership Dollars and Dollars In General Are More Difficult To Come By

- Membership – typical trends
  - Competition from other trade associations
  - Loss of "locally owned" businesses
  - More of a regional focus by businesses
  - Mergers/acquisitions of member businesses
  - The economy, whether good or bad, is an excuse used by businesses'
  - The business community does not understand the scope of what a chamber of commerce does
- Membership – current trends
  - Numbers/dollars down 10-15% during recession and in some cases higher
    - Currently: Slight recovery from recession and moving toward previous levels
  - Negotiated dues with long time members
  - New members much more difficult to recruit
- Finances
  - Sponsorship dollars are tighter as well
  - "Contribution" days are over
  - Some using reserves to keep chambers operating
  - Cutting staff and other expenses
- New models for membership dues
  - Tiered dues (20% of the MACE marketplace)
  - Pay for service approach

### 2. Volunteers Are More Difficult To Recruit

- Business owners are focused on keeping their business afloat
- "Downsizing" has eliminated traditional chamber volunteer positions/people
- Chamber volunteer experience has to deliver results and not be painful
- Competition for volunteers has increased due to a smaller pool of potential volunteers
- Dual income families -- less time to volunteer
- Volunteers have less time and expect chambers to do more – time is more valuable than \$
- Lack of orientation to volunteerism

### 3. Technology is Impacting Traditional Chamber Approaches and Communications

- Members/Volunteers want faster decisions
- Less paper

- Members want chamber communications to “meet them where they’re at” i.e. email, text, calls, social media
- Members want communications to be more targeted specifically to them, and to select what they receive (i.e. instead of a catch-all newsletter, specific emails about events, legislative activities, or other points of interest)
- Chamber are putting more emphasis on the branding and messaging of their particular chamber
- Member-to-member interactions, without the chamber serving as a middle man, are becoming more prevalent
- Technology is competing with chambers in many ways, especially in the networking sphere
- Calls and snail mail are once again the most valuable means of communication – email open rates are dropping quickly, and many are getting lost in the shuffle

#### **4. More Focus Than Ever on "Bottom Line" Benefits – “What’s in it for me?”**

- Focus on value/ROI
- Quality not quantity
- Beyond networking
- Beyond retail promotions
- Legislative/political action
- Chamber related products, i.e. seminars, discount programs, affinity programs
- More free networking events

#### **5. Good News – Some Chambers Are Becoming More Powerful**

- City, school district, county, state legislative activities
- Recognized as "voice of business"
- Inexpensive way to market and promote businesses
- Expanding menu of member benefits
- Increased effort by public sector to control the private sector agenda limits effectiveness of some local Chambers
- Outside interest groups attempting to control agenda

#### **6. Chamber Organizations as a Whole**

- Chambers have downsized
  - Less staff compared to the number of members than there previously used to be
- Trying to do more with less (less staff capacity, tighter budgets, etc.)

#### **7. Boards of Directors**

- Less CEO’s in leadership positions
- Struggle between focusing on policy governance (the Board’s job) and managing the day-to-day operations (staff’s job)

#### **8. How Are Successful Chambers Responding?**

- Focusing on why they were established and what chambers do best--represent the business community
- Asking their members what they want and delivering those products efficiently and economically
- Willing to take positions on issues and then really work to make the issue happen
- Efforts to retain and expand local businesses also a great membership retention tool
- Leadership programs continue to be a strong membership asset
- Giving members more “face time” at their place of business
- Having fewer, shorter and more productive meetings
- Cutting back on paper communications and e-mails
- Creating new programs focused on certain market niches
- Dramatically improving communications based on new technologies
- Developing new revenue generators (caution)
- Asking for constant feedback and input from members and non members
- Increasing their emphasis on legislative and, in some cases, political activities
- Investing in training, grooming and rewarding their volunteers
- Encouraging volunteers to have fun
- Outworking the competition
- Great chambers have a professional executive with a vision
- First and foremost, making the best use of member dollars and time, i.e. doing more with less volunteer resources
- Some larger retailers are getting more involved in local chambers – localizing in an attempt to be a part of the community at large, while others continue to ignore the local chamber