

I'm a Chamber Member. Now What?

Have you recently joined the chamber? Maybe you're overwhelmed by the number of benefits. How do you go about exploring the components of chamber membership that are most beneficial to you and your business? What if there are things you could benefit from that you know nothing about? Or maybe you're wondering when you're going to see your first new customer. Any minute, right?

If you're a brand new chamber member, there are a few things you should know about maximizing your membership benefits.

About Your Chamber Membership

Sometimes you'll hear that chamber membership is similar to a gym membership, you need to use it to gain the benefits. That's not exactly true.

Regardless of whether you attend a single chamber event, the chamber is still tirelessly advocating for you and your business on a legislative side, ensuring that the voice of business is heard in city council, at the state senate, and on the federal level.

Even if you never attend a single networking breakfast, the chamber is likely still referring inquiries about your industry or product to you. Community members and travelers often seek suggestions from the chamber on businesses in town.

Even if you never attend a ribbon cutting, the chamber is there to help you get back on your feet in times of natural disasters and other times of difficulty. It's not part of a membership benefit. It's just something they do because there's a need and they are uniquely connected to business and government. The hardworking chamber staff and board are often there to help in those critical times because they're a part of the community too.

So, you see you needn't do anything to partake in the benefits of chamber membership. But if you do, the return on investment for your business will be much richer.

You Joined the Chamber. Now What?

As a new chamber member, what comes first? Strategy.

Think about your goals for chamber membership. Why did you join in the first place? The reasons behind your chamber membership will give you some insight into how to make the most of your membership. But first, some important advice:

- **Read what the chamber gives you.** It's likely when you joined, they gave you brochures, sent emails, or even a welcome video. Whatever welcome content they provided, take a look at it. They may have given you a nice list of next steps or "Did You Know?" content.

- **Take a look at the chamber calendar** and make note of anything that interests you.
- **Follow their social media feeds.**

Assuming you've completed the steps above, it's time to think about what you want from the chamber. Why did you join?

Some of the most common reasons include:

- Getting more customers.
- Increasing your reach so more people know about you.
- Improving your reputation or becoming a larger part of the community.
- Meeting like-minded business people.

Or maybe you have your own reason to join.

Whatever it is, the reason you joined, the goal behind your membership, dictates what step you should take next to make the most of your chamber membership.

Ways the Chamber Can Help You Get More Customers and Increase Your Reach

If your goal in joining the chamber is more customers here are a couple of activities and things you can do right now.

1. **Go to the next chamber event.** Get to know people. Don't go there to sell. Go there to see how you can be of service to them. Bring business cards.
2. **Get listed in the member directory.**
3. **Talk to a staff member** (if you haven't already as part of the membership process) and find out how they can help you get your name out there.
4. **Be a part of the member-to-member discount programs.**
5. **Host a networking event** at your place of business.
6. **Add valuable comments on the chamber blog or share a special blog post of yours** that chamber members could benefit from. Never hard sell your services in blog posts like this. Look for ways to help others.
7. **Ensure the chamber has all of the pertinent information about your business** including hours of operation, address, and specialties. Give them brochures, if that's allowed.

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Some new members are looking for something other than more sales, although that may be part of their desire. Some have had PR problems in the past, they're new to the area, or they just want customers to see them as a valuable member of the community. If any of those are true, a chamber membership is a good investment.

If that's why you joined you should consider the following activities first:

1. **Proudly display your member sticker, window cling, website badge**, or whatever indication your chamber gives that you are a chamber member. Some chambers have a chamber member logo you can use for business cards, email signatures, and other public-facing displays of your alignment with the chamber.
2. **Get involved.** Your chamber has numerous opportunities to volunteer. There may be committees in specific areas or ambassadorship opportunities. By volunteering you can get to know other businesses on a deeper level than may be possible at monthly breakfasts.
3. **Sponsor an event.** If you want to get your business name associated with the chamber, sponsoring an event is a good way to do it. The chamber offers a lot of different levels of sponsorships so there's one that will fit your budget. Their events (and other opportunities) may draw slightly different crowds so talk with a chamber staffer to understand which one fits your ideal demographic. For instance, the newsletter sponsorship focusses on businesses but the Chamber's 4th of July Parade may catch the eye of more families.
4. **Run for the board.** While this may not be something you're ready to take on as soon as you become a chamber member, it is something you might want to (eventually) consider if you're trying to improve the reputation of your business. The governing board of the chamber is a large responsibility but also attracts some of the community's most well-connected and influential leaders.
5. **Join a lunch mob.** Helping others is a great way to become part of something larger than your own business. Check with the chamber to see if they are having a lunch or flash mob. These events bring in chamber members to a business on a pre-arranged day with the promise of each attendee spending \$10-20 at the establishment.
6. **Host a ribbon-cutting, open house, or anniversary milestone celebration.** Another way to showcase your business is through a grand-opening, anniversary celebration, or an open house. The chamber can help you organize one and may even work with the mayor's office. Check with them to see how each of these special events is handled.

Meet Like-Minded Business People

Another reason to seek a chamber membership is to be able to associate with like-minded business people. If that's your goal behind becoming a chamber member, consider the following benefits:

1. **Join a mentor program.** Check with the chamber to see if they have a formal mentor/mentee program. If not, they may have an informal one or they may have a leadership institute of some kind that will help put you in contact with peers. Being a business professional these days can be a lonely position. Meeting others in your industry, career level, or those with similar aspirations can be very inspiring.
2. **Attend networking events.** These come in a variety of times and agendas. There are breakfast networking events, after hours events, and even speed networking events. If you want to meet more people, show up and bring business cards.
3. **Join the conversation on social media.** Become a part of the online community and comment on the chamber's Facebook page and other's posts. Be helpful. Give compliments. When you do it consistently, you'll get to know others in the chamber even if you can't attend the networking events.
4. **Join the young professionals' group.** Some chambers offer a young professionals group that is perfect for members under 40 (or in a young state of mind. Check with your chamber about who is eligible.). Other chambers have women business owners subsets. Take a look at the organizations within the chamber to find your niche.

Other Chamber Benefits for Specific Needs

In addition to the goal-oriented benefits listed above, chambers offer a lot more benefits. Your chamber may also offer:

- certificates of origin
- guest blogging opportunities
- sharing news and event announcements through email blasts, calendars, and newsletters
- energy co-ops
- online speakers bureau listings
- marketing or social media assistance
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No matter why you joined the chamber, there are benefits to help you meet your goals. The best thing you can do for your investment is to get involved in a capacity that helps you advance your business. We've outlined some ideas here but these are only the beginning. In order to get the most out of chamber membership, make sure the membership coordinator understands your business goals. They can help put you on a path to get there and ensure you get tons of value from your membership.

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