

# Build Real B2B Relationships

## Look to your chamber of commerce as a lead source

by: Dale Stein, Technology Assurance Group (TAG)

One day, after months spent trying to make it as an actor in New York City, a young man finally landed his big theatrical debut. He arrived in Times Square with his costume on, ready to dazzle crowds on the famous red stairs. He was primed for a showstopping performance, but just as he launched into his first epic monologue, he looked out and realized that no one even noticed he was there.

Tourists were busy snapping selfies, street vendors were hawking tickets to actual Broadway shows and billboards flashed ads for TV premieres, new musicals and box-office releases. No one seemed to care about him; no matter how loudly he belted out or how ferociously he gyrated, not a single eye landed on him for more than a split second. After hours of virtually invisible theatrics, he finally gave up, pulled off his costume and sat on the steps dejected, sinking his forehead into his palms.

Just then, a homeless man with a parrot on his shoulder walked by and asked, “So what made you decide to get into this line of work?”

“Well, I used to do cold B2B email marketing and heard this was a better career option,” the actor said.

It’s no secret that in today’s noisy environment, cold outreach simply doesn’t cut it anymore in B2B sales and marketing (B2C may be another story). Email inboxes are overwhelmed, social media feels impersonal and people are numb to digital pitches.

So, what’s the solution? The same thing it always has been — to do the opposite of what the majority is doing. In this article, I’m going to share one of the most overlooked lead generation pools that few are utilizing — which is why it’s such a perfect target for B2B salespeople.

### It’s Time to Get Back to Building Real Relationships With Real Business Owners

I am not talking about handing out business cards at



networking happy hours. Real relationship building that leads to sales requires strategy and nurturing. You have to build “know, like and trust” into your sales process, and if your cold emails are going to your prospects’ junk mail, it’s going to be impossible to build any sort of meaningful relationship.

In this article, I’m going to share how we at Technology Assurance Group (TAG) are harnessing chambers of commerce to generate real connections with real business owners that result in real sales.

### The Chamber of Commerce Isn’t the Problem; It’s Your Lack of Strategy

Typically, salespeople overlook their local chambers of commerce for lead generation because they don’t have a strategic approach. Sure, they may have attended a few chamber meetings, passed out a handful of business cards and prayed for appointments that never came. If that were

all we taught here at TAG, we would have disregarded chamber membership, too. A passive approach like that will always underperform an active one.

The core principle is this: If you attend chamber meetings with the intention to take, your results will be lackluster. However, if you shift your intention to contribute, you can catapult your success.

### Step One: Join the Chamber's Recruitment Committee

When you join the recruitment committee, every conversation you have with a prospect shifts. Where many business owners might be reserved with you, anticipating a pitch, when you join the recruitment committee, its members start to view you as a potential collaborator. Prospects start to see you as a potential resource who can contribute to them, rather than take from them.

While that impression is only as good as your ability to continue to exceed it with your behaviors, it's a powerful way to reframe every conversation you're in with a potential prospect. We strongly recommend getting involved with your local chamber of commerce recruitment committee as a first step. Not only will it rebrand you in the eyes of every local business owner you interact with, but it also will help you serve the community at large, which attracts business. This step also gives you access to engage with the chamber's member list, so long as your intention is to help attract new members or facilitate educational and community-building events.

### Step Two: Become the Chamber's Go-To Business Educator

One of the biggest challenges chambers face is they are looking for true business expertise to share with their members. It's a core recruitment and retention strategy, and as a successful business leader, you already possess tremendous knowledge through all of your hard-earned industry expertise. Your skills, experiences and wisdom are all transferable to other professionals who are looking to improve their own success.

Host virtual lunch-and-learns, workshops or webinars to provide real value on topics like leadership, hiring and managing remote teams. Avoid product pitches. Establish yourself as a business advisor first and foremost so people start to regard you as an educational resource who will help them succeed in all areas of their businesses (and not just with your products and services). The more leadership you show, the more eager business owners will be to connect with you further.

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### Step Three: Educate, Educate, Educate

Remember that the chamber of commerce's number-one goal is to increase recruitment. However, it lacks the content and true business education necessary to entice members to join — which is where you come in.

You can solve this problem by providing pure education (without a pitch) on various topics that you know every business owner has on his (or her) mind. Here are sample topics you could teach:

■ The seven attributes of successful business owners

■ How to hire the right people through personality profiling assessments

■ How to manage and motivate a remote workforce

These topics are largely relevant to businesses of all shapes and sizes, and they will garner attendance because they address common problems. The chamber of commerce will push the message out to its member list because you're leading with true value.

TAG members have access to dozens of presentations on topics like those mentioned above, and we encourage them to put their logos on our presentations and present the content as their own. For example, we recently did a lunch-and-learn presentation on one of these topics to a single chamber of commerce with minimal marketing. We had 33 company representatives show up for the presentation. They were engaged and asking questions the entire time. We were also asked to present to additional chambers of commerce.

While our focus is on building longer-term relationships, it's never bad to engage with 33 business owners — while getting endorsed access to dozens more after only two hours of work.

While we can only give full access to paying TAG members, if you're reading this and would like to request one of the sample presentations mentioned above for the outlined usage, we're happy to share a single topic with BTA members. To request a copy of a presentation, just email [dales@tagnational.com](mailto:dales@tagnational.com) and let us know which topic's presentation you would like.

### Step Four: Guide the Chamber's Strategy By Helping It Recognize It Actually Has Two Different Customers

While some topics previously mentioned are relevant to everyone, we've noticed that chambers of commerce have two different "customers" and they need to separate those groups so that conversations, educational topics, executive

round tables and lunch-and-learns remain relevant.

One group is for the smaller mom-and-pop shops in town. These local business owners have a particular set of challenges that larger companies don't necessarily have. For example, put the local florist, the restaurant owners and the women's clothing boutique owner together in a group. Another group to consider is mid-sized companies with 25 to 500 employees. These groups need to be separated so the educational topics remain relevant to their current challenges.

As you become the new "educational arm" for the chamber of commerce, you will provide more generic education to the first group and more highly specialized information to the second group.

### Step Five: Follow Up, Respectfully

Now that you've become the chamber's go-to person for business growth advice, you can continue to nurture the relationships you've cultivated through authority marketing. This is when you can begin to follow up, respectfully.

After hosting an educational session, don't immediately ask attendees about client needs. Instead, follow up to get feedback on how the educational content was received and ask what else they would like to see from the chamber. Then you can offer additional content. The more you step into leadership, the more trust you garner and, eventually, businesses will gravitate toward you so that qualified clients start approaching you. Typically, after providing substantial value and establishing credibility, clients will seek more information from you and, when appropriate, you can discuss potential areas in which you can

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advise further. The overarching goal is establishing trust.

### In Summary

- Join the chamber's recruitment committee.
- Become the chamber's go-to business educator.
- Educate, educate, educate.
- Guide the chamber's strategy by helping it recognize it actually has two

different customers.

- Follow up, respectfully.

Simply put, take a strategic, personalized approach to outreach and you can harness group networking environments like chambers of commerce. That way you can ditch mass emailing, have real conversations, demonstrate expertise and provide resources with no strings attached. This lays the foundation for strong B2B relationships, which will drive sales regularly and consistently. ■

*Dale Stein is co-founder of Technology Assurance Group (TAG), an organization of managed technology service providers (MTSPs). Collectively, TAG's members do \$800 million per year in IT, cybersecurity, telecommunications and video surveillance. They are located in 148 cities across the United States and Canada, and are presently serving more than 780,000 SMBs. He is responsible for developing TAG's strategic planning and guiding its business development.*

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