



How to Choose a Chamber of Commerce

Are you thinking about joining a Chamber of Commerce? Now is a great time to align yourself with a business organization to help promote your business. As you begin your search, you will discover that there are many organizations to choose from. The hard part is deciding which one(s) to join. The steps in this guide are designed to help make your selection easier.

Identify two or three Chambers in your market area. Your “market area” might be where your business is located and/or where you want to do business. Survey each one so that you can compare what they offer.

Call the Chamber office. Did a live person answer the phone or did you get voice mail? If you left a message, how long did it take someone to return your call?

If you got through to a live person, what’s your first impression? Was the person friendly, professional and helpful or did you feel as if you were an interruption?

Identify reasons for joining a Chamber of Commerce. When you call, visit or talk to members, ask about opportunities that interest you the most. Some suggestions include: Business Referrals, Networking and Marketing Opportunities, Connections to the Business Community, Discounts on Products and Services, Business Resources and Information.

Visit the Chamber website. Does it contain useful information? Is it easy to use? What events are scheduled? How many events are offered? What types of committees are available? Is there a directory of members for you to view?

Is there an orientation program offered? Attending this type of program is a great way to get a first hand introduction to the Chamber.

Meet the Chamber staff – Are they professional and enthusiastic about helping members succeed? Ask questions to determine how responsive, supportive and resourceful the staff will be to you as a member.

How large is the Chamber? – Evaluate this three ways.

- The number of companies that are members of the Chamber.
- The size of the companies that belong to the Chamber.
- The territory that the Chamber covers. If you only want to do business and meet people in your immediate area, than the Chamber closest to you may be a good choice. If you want to broaden your market and reach a larger customer base, consider joining a regional Chamber that offers larger market exposure.

What Do Members Say? Ask for member feedback or ask for the names and numbers of a few members that you can call to learn how they value their membership.

How active are members in the Chamber? If networking is a goal, find out what kinds of events are offered, how often they run, and how well attended they are.

Attend An Event - Evaluate the meeting. Did you feel welcomed? Did the group seem friendly and supportive? Was the program well organized?

Educational Programs- Are seminars offered that will help educate you and/or your staff throughout the year? Are there opportunities for you to present a seminar?

How Entrepreneurial is the Chamber? Does the leadership seem stuck on doing things “the way they have always done things,” or is there a spirit of addressing members’ needs and proactively changing with the times. You want an organization that meets the needs of its members today, not yesterday.

Is the Chamber a Resource Center? As a business professional your time is valuable. When you need information, you need a resource to turn to for quick and accurate answers. Does the Chamber view itself as an informational hub for members? Would you feel comfortable calling the staff and asking a question?

What Benefits Come with Membership? – Benefits may vary from Chamber to Chamber, so be sure to ask what you get with your membership.

How Active Will You Be as a Member? To get the most out of your membership, you will want to be an engaged member. What on-going support does the chamber offer members? Does the membership director offer on-going coaching support and help in creating customized marketing plans to help members get the most out of their membership?

Membership Cost - What does a one-year membership cost? This is a key issue, but it is purposely put at the bottom of the list. It is important to evaluate what you get for your money before you evaluate the cost. If you only compare the cost to join, you may short change yourself and end up joining an organization that fits your budget, but not your needs.

Interested in learning more about the benefits of membership in the BWCC? You and a guest are invited to attend a free Membership 101 class held monthly at the BWCC office. For dates and directions, contact Nancy LaJoice, Membership Director at 301-725-4000 or nancy.lajoice@bwcc.org