

The Right ‘Associations’ Can Be Good For Business by Dave Willems

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Association.

Seems like a fairly harmless word when you look at it all by its lonesome. But in the business world, the right association for you and your business can have all kinds of implications – both good and bad.

Since most of us in business these days are dealing with the same obstacles our colleagues have faced for years – namely, limited time and dollars – it’s all the more important that we pick our networking and membership associations more carefully and strategically than ever.

Finding the right affiliations for you and your organization should be measured against the same rationale you use for your marketing efforts, where you are either looking to boost your image or to specifically sell a product or service.

Without question, there is no shortage of folks ready to tell you their association or membership group is the best one to put your money on...or in. And, in fact, most are credible entities that may be appropriate options for you. But how do you decide where to put your limited resources?

That’s where that word *strategic* comes in that we talk about so often. It’s important to take a look at your needs and goals and compare them against what you think you’ll be able to gain from such an association. If you’re looking at the Chamber of Commerce, for example, how will you be able to leverage your membership to make more legitimate business connections? Will being associated with the Chamber be a difference-maker for your company, or for you personally?

As you look at other organizations, keep asking yourself similar questions. One organization that has continued to evolve and expand its reach is the Better Business Bureau. Chances are you’ve noticed how well it’s been marketing itself over the past few years in comparison to previous years.

In Wisconsin alone, “The BBB” has been growing by leaps and bounds, which appears to be no accident. It’s obvious the organization made a clear decision to step up its game and make itself more relevant to businesses throughout the state. It’s no longer just about “complaints” or “calling attention to the bad guys.” Now it’s about being proud to be a business owner, making a commitment to ethical business practices, and helping professionals and organizations network and grow – while also focusing more than ever on educating consumers.

In talking with a few business owners who took a share of their marketing and outreach dollars and used them for membership in the BBB, doing so was very strategic. A few who were very confident in their current business practices made the link as a way of reinforcing their image and their way of doing business. Others are in a position where they want to work at fine-tuning or even improving their delivery and are intent to use the BBB emblem as proof of their commitment for the long-term. These businesses also know that many consumers see a BBB accreditation as being similar to a Good Housekeeping seal of approval and, for many, there’s concrete value in that.

Regardless of the reasoning, these businesses chose this particular affiliation with some clear goals in mind. Make sure when you’re considering spending some of those precious resources on a service club, a membership organization or a professional association, that you take the same strategic approach. It will actually end up saving you time and money in the long run.

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