



NEWSLETTER JANUARY 2019

10 Reasons to Join Your Chamber of Commerce

By Chris Mead

1. To strengthen the local economy by attracting jobs and helping existing companies expand.
2. To grow the economic pie so that your slice gets bigger.
3. To gain customers: studies* show that consumers are much more likely to buy from a company they think is a chamber member.
4. To help strengthen the educational, cultural, recreational, and medical systems in your community.
5. To recommend solutions to keep community infrastructure (transportation, water, environment) up to date.
6. To be part of an elite group: chamber-member companies have better credit ratings and better business practices than the average business, according to another study.**
7. To support programs that will improve the image of your community and its quality of life.
8. To represent business in the halls of government.
9. To make sure business receives reasonable and balanced treatment on government regulation and taxation.
10. To gain the chance to engage in B2B networking and to share business ideas, problems, and opportunities.

* "The Real Value of Joining a Local Chamber of Commerce: A Research Study," the Schapiro Group, Atlanta, GA. First study in 2007 and a follow-up study with similar positive results in 2012.

** "Chamber Members Have Higher Credit Scores," Cortera, Boca Raton, FL.

[Note: for further information on these studies, please contact Dana Ketterling, Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives, dketterling@acce.org, (703) 861-9382.]

The above list of 10 reasons doesn't have to be something you recite in person, or print out in your newsletter, verbatim. (You may do so, however, if you wish.) Of course you can and should select the salient points – possibly adding reasons of your own – depending on whom you are addressing. The manager of a factory that sells entirely out of the area doesn't care about the B2B sales opportunities, for example. She may not want to be bothered by lots of people trying to sell her things. But she could care very much about how the chamber can help the community find more and better trained workers.

The question of what's the true value of chambers of commerce has haunted me for the past 16 years, when I joined the staff of the Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives. I even spent seven years writing a book on what chambers of commerce have accomplished (*The Magicians of Main Street: America and its Chambers of Commerce, 1768-1945*). It amazed me how much chambers have done to change the nation, and how little we all knew about it. Hundreds of things as varied as the Golden Gate Bridge, the Miss America Pageant, and the Federal Reserve Bank all bear distinct chamber fingerprints.

Colorado has many chamber-aided achievements of its own, from the vital rail link of Denver to the Transcontinental Railroad to the Moffat Tunnel (opening up the west of the state to greater development) to the more recent creation of the Denver International Airport. And those of course are just a tiny sample of all that the state's chambers have been involved with.

There's a lot of information, from the past and the present that can help you sell people on the concept of the chamber. You can draw on whatever you think will matter most to your members and prospects. Chances are, however, the best answers will come from your heart. You don't have to agonize for seven or 16 or 36 years to come up with the true meaning of a chamber of commerce. Listen to your members. Listen to yourself. And then – tell the story.

Chris Mead recently retired from 16 years at the Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives, where he finished as senior vice president, specializing in revenue. In January 2019 he started a company that consults with chambers and chamber-serving firms, Magicians of Main Street. He can be reached at cmead1000@gmail.com.