

## COMMENTARY



# Leveraging Chambers of Commerce: A Strategic Edge for Small Businesses

Running a successful business isn't just about great products or services – it's about building relationships, staying visible, and being part of a thriving local economy. One often overlooked resource is your local chamber of commerce. These organizations offer a wealth of benefits, from legislative advocacy to excellent networking opportunities, making them an invaluable partner for businesses of all sizes. Here's why getting involved with your local chamber of commerce can be a game-changer for your business.

### Chamber 101

A chamber of commerce is a local organization dedicated to supporting and promoting the interests of businesses within a community. It serves as a hub for business owners, providing resources, networking opportunities, and advocacy on legislative issues. Chambers of commerce work closely with local and state governments to influence policies that benefit the business community. They also host events, workshops, and seminars to foster professional development and collaboration among members.

### Legislative advocacy

Among the many roles chambers of commerce play, legislative advocacy stands out as one of the most critical. Chambers have strong relationships with local

legislative and state districts, making them powerful allies for businesses. The most effective chambers are excellent at this, meeting with legislators quarterly, weekly, and annually, depending on the legislative session.

This association is invaluable because it keeps you informed about changes in the law that could impact your business. Staying connected with what's happening in the legislature helps protect your business and serve your customers better.

### Networking opportunities

Large chambers of commerce are particularly known for their robust networking opportunities. They bring in speakers, host lunches, and organize events that provide education and local connections at a low cost. These events are not just about learning; they are also about meeting other business owners, potential clients, and partners.

While large chambers of commerce are renowned for their extensive networking opportunities and resources, small chambers offer unique advantages that are equally valuable for businesses. They provide increased visibility, tailored support, and resources that cater specifically to local needs. Additionally, small chambers



are more flexible and responsive to changes in the local business environment, offering timely support and resources.

By being involved with both large and small chambers, businesses can maximize their benefits and thrive in their local communities, as they become part of a powerful organization where businesses, school districts, and legislators come together to collaborate and support each other.

### **Professional development**

Joining a chamber of commerce offers excellent professional development opportunities. Many chambers have a network of volunteers and board members who are involved in the strategy and future direction of the chamber. Serving on a board or committee not only enhances your resume but also allows you to build relationships and give back to the community. It's a great way to develop leadership skills and gain visibility in your local business community.

Staying informed

Chambers of commerce are a powerful tool to stay connected and informed about local business trends and legislative changes. They play a huge role in keeping businesses updated on what's happening in the law, which is crucial for making informed decisions and staying compliant with regulations.

### **Tips for new businesses**

If you're new to the business community, here are some tips to get involved with your local chamber of commerce:

- Attend member orientation sessions: These are usually held over breakfast or lunch. They are a valuable resource to learn about the chamber and its benefits.
- Evaluate before joining: You can attend events and check out the chamber's website before committing to membership. This helps ensure the chamber is the right fit for your business.

- Volunteer on a committee: Volunteering allows you to work on projects with other members, helping you build stronger relationships and balance your business needs.
- Use your best judgment: Every community is different, so find the chamber that best fits your business needs. Smaller chambers can also offer significant benefits, providing a more personalized and supportive environment, often at a lower cost than larger chambers. By choosing the right chamber and actively participating, you can build strong connections, stay ahead of legislative changes, and contribute to the economic vitality of your community. Embrace the opportunities that come with chamber membership and watch your business thrive!

### **Driving Business Forward**

Chambers of commerce are indispensable allies for businesses, offering a strategic edge through advocacy, networking, professional development, and staying informed. By actively engaging with both large and small chambers, businesses can harness these benefits to drive growth and success in their local communities.

### **About Sharlene Wells**

From Utah's Miss America to Emmy-nominated ESPN sports broadcaster, Sharlene Wells has had a remarkable career. She covered prestigious events like World Cup Soccer and Kentucky Derby, produced documentaries and books for the Department of Defense, earning a role on the Defense Advisory Committee for Women in Services and a public service medal in 2018. Now Senior Vice President at Mountain America, she is recognized as a "Woman of the Year" by Utah Business magazine and a "trailblazer" by Ragan Communications. Sharlene holds degrees from BYU and U of U, serving on boards like AMAR International and USO Intermountain Advisory Council. She has four children, and is passionate about traveling, hiking, biking and most especially, being with her family.

