

Chamber membership is key for businesses

THE CHAMBER VIEW

by Pamela Tumpap



Active chamber members understand well that when a business is involved with the chamber, it helps not only the community, but also the

business' success as well.

They view chamber membership as a necessity and see the low membership fee — less than 78 cents per day for a company of five or fewer — as a required investment: part of doing business on Maui or anywhere. They get that “chambers” are recognized widely and valued across the country, and stand for excellence in business and ethics. These business leaders network and build relationships with other leaders, and enjoy being a part of a dynamic organization that is evolving constantly to meet its members', the business sector's and the community's needs. They know that the value of their membership goes far beyond the dollars paid. And the return on investment keeps improving beyond the benefits stated in a typical chamber brochure.

A national study by the Atlanta-based Shapiro Group consulting firm shows that membership in a local chamber of commerce can boost significantly a business's image

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among consumers as well as among other businesses. A scientific survey of 2,000 adults revealed positive perceptions of chamber members in a number of areas — including overall favorability, consumer awareness and reputation, and likelihood of future patronage.

The study showed that when respondents were told that a particular small business was a member of its local chamber, they were 44 percent more likely to rate it favorably than study respondents who were not told of a chamber affiliation. Respondents were also 63 percent more likely to want to purchase goods or services from a chamber-affiliated small business.

Alex Trouteaud, senior strategist for The Schapiro Group, said, “We discovered that informing someone about a company's chamber membership opens the door to substantial increases in positive perceptions of that business. There clearly is a feeling by our respondents that chamber membership is synonymous with quality and desirability.”

The study found that when a consumer thinks that a company's products stack up better against the competition because the company is involved in its local chamber of commerce, it is because he or she infers that the company is trustworthy, is involved in the community and is an industry leader.

Positive perception about cham-

ber membership extended to big businesses, as well. For example, when consumers believed that a restaurant chain was a member of the local chamber of commerce, they were 40 percent more likely to eat at the franchise in the future. And if a consumer believed that one of the major automobile manufacturers was a member of its local chamber, that consumer was 9 percent more likely to consider purchasing his or her next car from that automaker.

“This study reinforces research done in 2005 about the perceived capacity of chambers to lead businesses and lead communities,” said Mick Fleming, president of the American Chamber of Commerce Executives. “These new national findings point to even more direct benefits for companies willing to be stakeholders in their local chamber.”

“The message from this national study is as simple as it is groundbreaking,” said small-business advocate Jim Blasingame. “Join your local chamber, be an active participant in your chamber's programs and be sure to let your customers and prospects know you're a proud chamber supporter when they come in your business and when they see your marketing material.”

The study also noted that 82 percent of the respondents indicated that a local chamber of commerce

“creates jobs and promotes economic development.”

Moreover, we now can show that chamber membership is a strong differentiator that helps businesses positively stand out. We encourage members to actively share their Maui Chamber or Commerce affiliation by not only displaying the chamber decal and membership certificate at their locations, but also putting the chamber logo on their Web sites, letterheads, advertising, etc. Speaking of advertising, we want members to remember to include the Maui Chamber of Commerce logo in their Maui News display advertising to receive 5 percent off as part of the chamber's member-to-member discount program.

The Maui Chamber of Commerce has been serving Maui businesses and this community for 100 years, and helps our members reach their goals. Making a commitment to active membership can take your business from being a listing on a page to being a player in the community. For those businesses that are not yet members, joining can take you from the sidelines to being part of a winning team. So proudly share the chamber with others, and reap the good will and rewards. This investment provides solid returns.

■ *Pamela Tumpap is president of the Maui Chamber of Commerce.*