

Strength In Numbers: Why Making The Most of Your WCA Membership Makes Good Cents!

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As a public relations and marketing consultant I often receive calls from business owners and managers who share with me tales of their ailing businesses and are looking for instant solutions to boost their bottom lines. There are a number of questions I ask about each and every business I come in contact with. One of the questions I routinely ask is what trade association(s) do they belong to and how do they participate in trade association activities? I then ask are they knowledgeable about what programs and specific business and industry tools their association has to offer and do they incorporate those benefits in their daily business activities?

I hear lots of excuses why people and companies don't want to join professional or trade associations. Some rebel at having to attend another meeting. There are not enough hours in the day, days in a week, weeks in a year to give up valuable time to attend a meeting when one's priorities should be spent running the business. Others do not join, or if they are coerced to join, do not participate because they believe associations have little to offer.

These attitudes are not attitudes of successful business people. Successful business people derive maximum use of their memberships. Memberships are seen as "inventory" or assets rather than expenses. Joining and not participating in association activities is passing up opportunities to be better at one's business. It is tantamount to leaving one's inventory sitting idle on the back shelf. Idle money does no one any good.

A business should join only those professional and trade associations that offer activities in which someone from the business will participate. That does not mean that the company or the company's representative has to stop day-by-day duties and let the association become their life. A person or company should select those associations in which they believe membership will help return a multiple of the dues by furthering knowledge and/or showing the way to new and more profitable business.

There are five benefits professional and trade associations offer. Availing oneself of these benefits helps get maximum value for the dollar.

The first benefit is at the local level. Rather than thinking that competitors will discover "our/my secret formula," a member will learn that others have similar attitudes and problems. An association acts as a forum to bring people together. The purpose is to raise the level of expertise and quality of service for the good of the industry and, more importantly, for the good of each business's customers and clients. In addition, by keeping one's eyes and ears open one will find that there is much useful information floating around. When talking and meeting with one's competitors, "listening between the lines" is a very important skill to nurture.

The second benefit comes from attending regional and national meetings. Here one can talk about business problems without the fear of letting secrets out of the bag. In some cases, successful business people set regularly scheduled discussions with their counterparts from other cities or states to discuss problems and ideas without hurting their local advantages. Because there is no threat to one's business, each is more open to talk about their successes and failures.

The third benefit associations offer businesses is by acting as a watchdog over legislative and regulatory bodies that make laws and rules that could be detrimental to

their industry. Most associations have taken on the role of being the eyes and ears of its members.

The fourth benefit businesses derive from their associations happens when the association disseminates pertinent industry information. Most associations have newsletters that keep their membership up-to-date on the latest methods, solutions to problems, products, and services.

The fifth benefit is participation in the membership benefit programs. The benefit programs offered to WCA members can save them a lot of money, quite often saving them each year more than their annual dues costs them.

Belonging to trade or professional organizations is as important to a business as developing products and services for their clients and customers. The money invested in the inventory of trade and professional organization memberships can return much more than the annual investment of dues.

This particular issue of the *WCA Report* is the Pre-Convention issue and is mailed outside the WCA membership, so you may or may not be a WCA member. If you are a WCA member, the question becomes are you taking full advantage of your WCA membership? Do you encourage other professional carwash operators to join WCA and take full advantage of what WCA has to offer? WCA trade association membership will boost your bottom line and improve your business operations in the process.

If you're not a WCA member, review the list of **Member Benefits** on page 36 of this issue. Then go to our website at www.wcwa.org and open the article *Membership Application & Member Benefits* to download the application. WCA membership is an investment in your business! ■