

## FIVE YEARS YOUNG!

**B**NI has just celebrated the fifth anniversary of its arrival in the UK and Ireland with the opening of its 330th chapter in Exeter, and a commemorative celebration among members of its very first UK chapters at Harrow and Northwood.

With thousands of businesses belonging to

chapters from Galway to Gravesend, and Plymouth to Perth, BNI's growth has been substantially faster across the UK and Ireland than in any other country throughout the world, including America where the organisation's roots were laid in 1985.

While there was an inkling of BNI's likely popularity from the launch of the first chapter in Harrow back in December 1996, nobody could have anticipated it would

become the UK's biggest business networking organisation quite so quickly.

Significantly, around one-third of Harrow Chapter's current membership comprises founder members who attended that first meeting, and have seen their businesses flourish over the past five years.

"None of us had any idea what to expect, but after my first breakfast meeting I knew that BNI would be good for my business and, five years later, I'm even more certain," said Nigel Loli, who reckons membership has increased the turnover of his vehicle engineering business, Carwrights, by an average of £25,000 a year.

Nigel was among the many members and guests when the Harrow and Northwood chapters held a joint fifth anniversary breakfast at Batchworth Park Golf Club, Rickmansworth just before Christmas, at which special five-year ribbons were presented to 11 members who have been in BNI since it was launched in the UK.

National Director Martin Lawson said: "For BNI to be represented in nearly every major conurbation across the UK and Ireland, is a tribute to all the direc-

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## Karl lends a cool £1.5m

THERE'S MORE than one bank that likes to say 'yes' – especially when the customers are BNI members or their acquaintances.

Karl Redmond is Business Manager for the Royal Bank of Scotland's East Parade branch in Leeds from which he has sanctioned lending of over £1.5 million to customers referred to him through the city's Armouries (Tuesday) Chapter in ten months.

"I can't tell you what that might be worth to the bank," said delighted Karl, "but I've received around 30 referrals in the few months since I joined BNI, and they're now flowing in at the rate of about a dozen a month. We're doing very good business through my chapter colleagues."

Karl heard about BNI's rapid expansion through Yorkshire from a colleague in another chapter and was sold from his first visit to the Leeds North Chapter.

"In turn, a lot of my colleagues at other Yorkshire branches of the RBS have now joined their local BNI chapters, after seeing how much new business I was attracting. I think there must be a Royal Bank manager in nearly every BNI group in the region."



**MANY HAPPY RETURNS!** Chapter Directors, Howard Smith (right) and Neil Marshall (left) of Northwood and Harrow respectively, cut their chapters' fifth birthday cake. Behind them are 14,225 referral slips representing the £4.4million worth of business the two chapters have generated.

## Chapter count passes 330

BNI'S RAPID growth across the UK and Ireland has continued through the autumn and festive period with the opening of more than two dozen new groups – including Exeter (Cathedral) which became our 330th chapter just before *SuccessNet* went to press.

Exeter's second chapter was one of several new groups to have opened in the South and South West of England, where others were Bradford-on-Avon,

Brighton (Albion), Chippenham and Plymouth (Astor)

Elsewhere, other recently launched chapters include Ayr, Bradford (Wednesday), Bradford (Friday), Colwyn Bay, Dublin (City West), Elmbridge, Fulham, Heartland (Perthshire), Leeds Marriott (Friday), Lisburn (County Antrim), Liverpool (Phoenix), Lymm, Norwich (Castle), Sheffield Succeeds and Walsall.

## Five years young

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tors, leadership teams and members, but even more importantly, it demonstrates the huge benefits that BNI's 'Givers Gain' philosophy brings to any and every business community."

The key factor behind BNI's rapid expansion is the obvious and immediate proof that membership is a highly valuable asset to nearly any business.

In the past 12 months alone, UK members have developed around £100 million worth of business for each other.

Martin added: "Probably the best testimonial for BNI's popularity is that we have never sought to open groups in any new area without being invited by the local business community, so the fact that we are now represented in most parts of the UK and Ireland speaks for itself.

"Other business networking organisations may come and go, but BNI is here to stay."

## SuccessFull!

IT'S ODD when you have to apologise for your own success, but such is *SuccessNet's* growing popularity that we're unable to publish some of your contributions, despite our recent expansion to 16 pages.

To everyone who has sent in ideas, stories and photos, please accept our grateful thanks.

We will publish some of the items in the Spring issue, so please, don't be put off. Keep reading – and keep sending in your news and views.

# Mongolians seek advice from BNI

**O**ne of the world's least developed countries has sought advice from BNI on promoting business in its emerging economy.

This latest recognition of BNI's maturing status as a world force in business development came a few weeks ago when a senior delegation from Mongolia's Ministry of Industry and Trade specifically requested talks with UK/Ireland national directors to see how BNI could assist the growth of small and medium sized enterprises in the world's youngest capitalist economy.

The Mongolian delegation, headed by Mr

Tseden Yonden, State Secretary for Industry and Trade, met Martin and Gillian Lawson as part of a study visit to examine British methods of encouraging and supporting SMEs in the business economy.

Martin Lawson said: "We were delighted to learn that, even though the nearest BNI presence to Mongolia is nearly 2,000 miles away in Malaysia, the Mongolian delegation knew all about our achievements in expanding SME economies around the world.

"After our discussions, the delegation visited NatWest's headquarters and were impressed to find that many of the Bank's business managers are already benefiting from membership of BNI groups."



**DRESSED FOR THE PART:** Some of Wakefield Thursday Chapter's members, 'dressed' with props to reflect their occupations.

## More Angels

RIVAL groups of Charlie's Angels are hard at work in UK chapters!

In the last issue of *SuccessNet*, we reported on the first self-styled Charlie's Angels – in the shape of Daventry Chapter's new all-female leadership team but, before anyone could say "Morning, Angels", a rival team had announced its presence.

Wakefield Thursday Chapter's 'Angels' comprise Chapter Director Jeni Rankin, a personnel consultant, Secretary/Treasurer Cherry Shiel, a will writer, and Membership Co-ordinator Arlene Oldham, a marketing consultant.

Jeni said: "We were a bit miffed when we read about Daventry. We reckon we are the original all-girl team."

• Jeni Rankin can be contacted on 01484 683872.

# Ten receive Founders Award

TEN MORE UK chapters have been presented with a prestigious Founders' Award in recognition of their consistently high performance over the year.

Given at the discretion of BNI Founder and Chief Executive Dr Ivan Misner after suitable recommendation from regional directors, the award is made to relatively few chapters whose members maintain high quality and substantial referral rates, bring a significant number of visitors to their meetings and achieve good business results by applying BNI's Givers Gain philosophy.

The proud recipients of Founders Awards during the past three months are: Drake Chapter (Plymouth), Gatwick

(Sussex), Harrow, Indigo Chapter (Liverpool), Moortown (Leeds), Leeds North, Northants, Pinner, Stafford and Tamworth.

Meanwhile among the latest members to receive Gold Club badges for individual success in attracting new members are: Paul Barton of the Drake Chapter (Plymouth), Richard Bedells (Wellingborough), Lawrence Dagnall (Richmond Upon Thames), Richard Helliwell (Armouries Tuesday, Leeds) and John Leach (Armouries Thursday, Leeds, pictured right receiving his badge from Executive Director Niri Patel). Our congratulations to everyone involved!





## Business blooms – at 19



**W**hen you're just 19 and starting out in business, the world can seem a hostile place. Not least, when you live in a small village community where potential customers are few and far between.

That was the situation faced by landscape gardener Peter Squires until he was invited by a fellow villager, writer and media relations consultant Pam Austin, to accompany her to a meeting of Corby Chapter, since when his fledgling business has started to bloom

"Pam and I have known each other for a few years and she was aware that I'd started my own landscape gardening business in the summer. Things were moving rather slowly but in September she invited me to attend a business breakfast

meeting with her, and said it might be good for me.

"I'd never heard of BNI but from what I saw at that first breakfast, I knew she was right. I've only been in BNI for three months but already I'm averaging one referral a week and at least 50 per cent of all my work comes through my chapter colleagues," he added.

At 19, Peter (pictured with Chapter colleague Martin Wall of Shire Security) is believed to be the youngest member of BNI in the UK, but his relative youth has not inhibited his integration into the Chapter.

"I'm very keen on amateur dramatics and enjoy acting, so having to present my business to 30 strangers wasn't too difficult – especially since everyone gave me such a warm welcome."

• **Peter can be contacted at Albany Garden Services on 01858 535485.**

## Rainbow restorers clean up

FORMER teachers Jill and Stuart Simpson have just mopped up a top national franchise award – less than four years after quitting their college jobs to start a cleaning business and barely 12 months since Stuart suffered a near fatal sports accident.

Ironically, their success in beating well-known High Street franchise names like McDonalds Restaurants, Clarks Shoes and Prontaprint, is due in no small part to Stuart's post-accident decision to join his local BNI chapter in Loughborough, as part of his rehabilitation into the business world.

The Simpsons' cleaning and restoration franchise, Rainbow International of Leicester, won third prize in the British Franchise Association's (BFA) Franchisee of the Year Awards, sponsored by the HSBC, beating off fierce competition from hundreds of entrants among Britain's 27,000 franchisees

Yet it could so easily have been a different story. Twelve months ago Stuart came close to death after a freak accident. "I lost my balance during a game of tennis and my head struck the edge of the racket which caused a near fatal brain injury," he said.

"I went into a coma and had part of my skull cut away to remove a blood



**TOP PERFORMERS:** Stuart and Jill Simpson (centre) after receiving their national franchise award from Sir Bernard Ingham, President of the British Franchise Association (left), watched by HSBC's National Franchise Manager Cathryn Hayes.

clot. It was a close call and it led to me reshaping my priorities."

Jill suddenly found herself having to manage the growing business, as well as her home and family – but earning plaudits for the way met the challenge.

Against the odds, Stuart made a remarkable recovery and was back at work within two months.

He added: "My accident led me to BNI. When I returned to work, I felt a bit lost because things had moved on. I decided to join BNI to give myself a new

focus and develop new business contacts.

"I'm really glad I did. I've met some great people and quite apart from the additional work they have introduced, BNI has been a very useful tool in helping us reorganise the business.

"We've already used the services of half a dozen colleagues and now, whatever I'm looking for, I always go through my BNI contacts first – knowing I can rely on fellow members."

• **Stuart and Jill Simpson can be contacted on 01509 215858.**



## Lawsons' Lore

BNI National Directors MARTIN & GILLIAN LAWSON write...

In our members' healthy pursuit of BNI's main purpose – to generate more and better business for themselves by helping others achieve their business aims – it is all too easy to forget about two other related, and very important BNI objectives: profitable business education and self-development.

Yet it goes without saying that for any of us to be truly successful businessmen and women, we must be reasonably expert in good business practice – not least in marketing our goods or services – just as we need to be sufficiently self-motivated, confident and able to present ourselves (and our businesses) in the best possible light.

It therefore gives us particular satisfaction to witness the hugely beneficial (and increasing) impact that BNI is having, not just in helping countless businesses become stronger and more profitable, but in helping members acquire new business and personal skills they never thought they would possess.

To highlight just one example of this, look at Phil Brumfitt's comments (reported on the back page) on the way that BNI has given him confidence in public speaking and presentation, and great self-belief – highly desirable qualities that he could only aspire to before joining his local Merseyside chapter.

When Phil joined BNI just a year ago, he was reluctant even to stand up and tell his own chapter colleagues about his catering business, but in just 12 months, he has doubled his business turnover and, equally importantly, he is now such a confident and entertaining presenter, he's in demand by leading business management organisations as a keynote speaker!

His case is by no means exceptional. Throughout the world, BNI has provided an excellent, practical basis for thousands of people who wanted to learn more about the right way of developing a successful business, and who needed to improve their own presentational and inter-personal skills along the way.

One needs only to look at any copy of *SuccessNet* to see how effective BNI's training and education have been and, as we pass the fifth anniversary in the UK and Ireland, it is good to report that these aspects of BNI's philosophy will play an increasingly important role in our further growth as a major business force in Britain. A happy and prosperous New Year to all our members.

## Essex to host first cross-Thames day

The historic but little-known Essex coastal town of Maldon will play host this April to the first cross-Thames regional Members' Day.

Following the fifth Annual European Directors' Conference at the Five Lakes Hotel, Golf & Country Club in Maldon, members from chapters in East Anglia, Kent and Greater London areas will join forces on Saturday April 20 for an intensive day's programme of presentations, practical workshops and networking sessions.

Tickets for this major networking and training event will be available through chapters from the start of February and they are expected to sell out quickly, so anyone wanting to participate is advised to book early.

National Director Gillian Lawson said: "The value of these regional events is immense, not just in terms of the substantial business networking opportunities they afford, but for the new business skills and techniques that are there to be picked up in workshops and training sessions."

Members who want to stay overnight at Five Lakes can reserve accommodation through BNI's national office on 01923 826181. Further event information can be obtained from BNI's website at: [www.bni-europe.com](http://www.bni-europe.com).

Meanwhile, those interested in local history may like to know that one of Maldon's several claims to fame is its links with USA President George Washington, whose great-great-grandfather was born in the coastal town.

## Scotland sets standard

IF YOU still think breakfast is the most important meal of the day for BNI members, you obviously weren't among the 200-plus participants in Scotland's Inaugural Annual Awards Dinner at Glasgow's five-star Hilton Hotel.

What is now set to become BNI's most important annual event north of the border, saw 22 members receive special awards for having made the greatest overall contributions to their BNI groups – having each polled the highest number of votes from chapter colleagues in a closed ballot.

Attended by members from all over Scotland, the awards dinner was voted an outstanding success, with the names of winners kept secret until the night when each collected their award from BNI National Director Martin Lawson and Benny Higgins, Chief Executive (Retail Banking) of the Royal Bank of Scotland, the sponsors.

After the formalities, three of the country's top speakers, Benny Higgins, entertainer Craigie Veitch, and John Hatfield, Business Editor, publisher and raconteur, kept everyone in party mood, while BNI's charity member, the Children's Appeal Foundation, raised around £1,500 for good causes through a prize raffle.

Martin Lawson said: "What a fantastic event this was! Scotland did more than come of age by staging such an impressive event – it set the standard by which other regional events will be compared."

Event organiser, Don Spence, who was co-incidentally voted his chapter's best performing member, added: "With tongue firmly in cheek we billed the Scottish 2001 Awards Dinner as 'the biggest networking event ever', but with the support of members from all over the country, in Scottish terms that is precisely what it was. It was the perfect reminder that we are part of the fastest growing and most effective business building organisation in the world."

**Individual award recipients were:** Chris Chirnside (Edinburgh Pentlands), Mark Thirgood (Edinburgh West), Tom London (Edinburgh Central), Carlene Van Doring and Joanne Brindley (both West Lothian – tied), Ross Lindsay (Cumbernauld), Sid Grant (Balgeddie), Francoise Noblesse (St Andrews), Audrey Fenton (Perth), Gill Carrie (Dunfermline), Martin Walker (Strathkelvin), Robert Ross (Kirkcaldy), Peter Gibson (Tayside), Graham Struthers (Stirling), William Sivewright (Kilmarnock), Steve McFadyen (Uddingston), John Robson (Hamilton), Stewart Wilson (Giffnock), Alistair McLaughlan (Clyde), David Bone (Glasgow, Alpha), Mary Parker (Glasgow, West End) and Don Spence (Glasgow, Victoria).



# LIFE BEGINS AT 40!

**D**espite having achieved its target of 40 members less than two years after it was launched, the Leeds Armouries (Thursday) Chapter still makes visitors one of its permanent priorities.

“We all know that the more people who attend our weekly breakfasts, the more energy will be created and the more referrals will be exchanged. Our aim is to attract four or five visitors every week, giving every member the chance to gain another ten per cent of extra business,” said John Leach, under whose directorship the Chapter reached capacity a few months ago.

Consequently, the role of visitor hosts is especially important. John added: “As the first point of contact for visitors, they are key to a chapter’s success, so their performance is vital. Fortunately, we have excellent visitor hosts and nearly every newcomer who attends our meetings comments on the great atmosphere. Life was already good in our chapter before we reached 40-strong, but now it’s even better.

“Crucial to our success was sharing ownership of our goals with all the members. We had a major push for new members, concentrating on visitor days and identifying specific business categories from which we needed to attract new members. We were unanimous that we wanted only positive, enthusiastic people,” he said.

“There is now a great atmosphere, which combines professional dynamism with camaraderie and genuine mutual support. Referrals are flowing like never before, and nobody thinks twice about getting up at five or six in the morning to attend. It has become a high point in everyone’s working week,” John added.

Having reached capacity, members of the Leeds Armouries (Thursday) Chapter plan to take a bold step in the near future, by agreeing to exchange only ‘third party’ referrals with each other.

“Such a move represents our progress towards achieving BNI’s core business aims,” John added. “Because we are now such a confident, dynamic and mutually supportive group, no-one will fear a referral system based solely on third-party business requirements. Members want to find each other the best possible business.”

**JUST OVER a 100 miles south-west of Leeds, in the leafy stockbroker-belt suburbs of East Birmingham, members of the Little Aston Chapter have even**

**LIFE, IT IS SAID, begins when you reach 40. True or not, in BNI there is absolutely no doubt that the quality of members’ business lives takes on a whole new dimension when their chapter reaches its optimum strength of 40 members. As BNI expands and consolidates across the UK and Ireland, so a growing number of chapters are coming of age – having established stable, highly effective groups, whose dynamics and higher referral rates make them the best performing chapters. Here, SuccessNet looks at two such chapters that recently turned 40.**



**MORE MEANS MORE: More chapter members will lead to more referrals.**

**more reason to feel satisfied about their achievement in passing the 40-member target, less than a year after the group was formed.**

Today Little Aston has 42 members and, says the immediate past Chapter Director Noel Farrelly: “We are very focused on objectives which may be why, for example, we gained 12 new members from two highly successful visitors days,” said Noel.

“We are also fortunate in that many of our members are naturally ebullient, who enjoy getting up and talking about their businesses.

“Little Aston’s meetings must be among the liveliest and most vibrant of any chapter, but behind the joviality and camaraderie, a lot of serious business takes place and, as the group has reached capacity, the volume of quality referrals has dramatically increased. We are now passing a large number of high quality referrals,” he said.

Noel also believes that personal friendships and mutual respect between

members, are keys to a chapter’s successful growth. “One of the best things about our group is the way that members look out for each other and genuinely want to help each other’s businesses,” he said.

BNI’s Assistant Director for the Birmingham area, Mark Panayides told SuccessNet: “Little Aston is an incredibly powerful chapter whose meetings move at a fast pace. There’s always a buzz of excitement and expectation, and that’s what sets them apart from average groups. Visitors come away amazed by what they’ve encountered.”

National Director Gillian Lawson said: “Statistics from BNI chapters throughout the world all confirm the same thing – that the number of quality business referrals increases at a disproportionately faster rate as membership grows. This means that while a young chapter of just 15 to 20 members typically passes an average of 50 referrals a month, a well-established 30 to 40-strong group would be likely to exchange up to 300 referrals a month.”



# Relax, listen and don't say too much

**B**y the time you are reading this, early in 2002, the chances are that you may have made some New Year's resolutions – including one or two that reflect your business aims for the coming year.

Everyone wants bigger and better business, and the vast majority of us join BNI in the hope and belief that if we follow its philosophy and practices, we will benefit in terms of greater financial security and better relationships with our customers, suppliers and other business contacts.

Yet sometimes, for no obvious reasons, newcomers to BNI seem to get off on the wrong foot and, when this happens, their chances of sharing the many benefits of membership quickly reduce.

In Newbury Chapter, we take our networking seriously and, with some excellent long-established guidelines in place – such as Giver's Gain – we see no reason to re-invent the wheel.

Against this backdrop, whenever I have the privilege of presenting the education item (bearing in mind that it is shared between many different members) I have three recurring messages to my chapter colleagues, and believe that other chapters which have experienced difficulties in 'settling' new members, might benefit from adopting them:

## 1 Don't say too much

One of the keys to my chapter's fairly rapid growth (our aim is to reach 40 members early this year) is that we are diligent in the way we approach prospective members, telling would-be visitors only that we are looking for a person in their business category to whom we can refer new business, and not trying to persuade them to join us as soon as they walk through the door.

In my limited experience of visiting chapters and seeing how others attract guests, a common failing seems to be that in the understandable desire to convert visitors to members, those making the phone calls and issuing the invitation letters try to tell their prospective visitors far too much about BNI.

If, for example, you tell a potential guest that he or she will have to get up

**THE DECISION** to appoint education co-ordinators for every BNI chapter has led to the education slot becoming one of the most eagerly awaited parts of the breakfast agenda, and a much-valued means of imparting business tips and training techniques to members. In this, the second SuccessNet column for sharing education issues, **PAUL CLEGG**, Education Co-ordinator of Newbury Chapter suggests three ways in which we can get more from our BNI membership.



• Paul Clegg

at 5.30 in the morning every week to fulfil a key obligation of membership, is it any wonder that they'll find a good reason why they cannot commit to such an early weekly meeting?

We should not frighten off our visitors, any more than we should expect to decide – on their behalf – what they will or will not get out of BNI membership.

Everyone has to decide for themselves whether BNI is right for them.

## 2 Listen – don't talk:

Having welcomed new visitors to your chapter, there is a tendency to want to talk at them, about your own business and about BNI, rather than listen to them, and ask them questions about themselves and their businesses.

If you show genuine interest in visitors' businesses, you will be regarded as interesting by them – because you have taken the time and trouble to ask questions and learn about them. And, when

someone sees you as an interesting person, they are far more likely to consider doing business with you.

It is useful to watch colleagues – especially new members – give their 60-second presentations each week, because so many people are initially focused on what BNI can do for them, before eventually shifting their stance to 'What can I give to BNI and my chapter colleagues?' – which, of course, is BNI's Giver's Gain philosophy. You 'give' by listening to others, and seeing how you can help meet their needs, not trying to fulfil your own.

## 3 Be proud of BNI:

I suspect that for some members, BNI begins and ends at the door of their weekly chapter meeting and, when they leave, they largely forget about it until it's time for next week's breakfast.

To get the most from your membership of any organisation, you have to fully participate and 'fly the flag' for BNI – and that doesn't just mean for the 90 minutes or so you spend over breakfast with your chapter colleagues.

Every week I urge my colleagues to always wear their BNI lapel pin and always carry their business card holder whenever they leave their offices, partly as a constant reminder to themselves (and their clients) that they are a member of the BNI business network, but also because it helps you to find referrals and win new business at business events. So your BNI pin and cardholder are important ice-breakers which you should use to maximum benefit.

• Paul Clegg is an independent telecommunications consultant for Euphony Communications. He can be contacted on 01264 338153.



## BE STRONG-WILLED – and ruthless in implementing the rules, says Phil Hopkins (Leeds North Chapter)

As I look around BNI, it is very evident that the most successful chapters are those which have high calibre, successful members. By definition, many of these people will either be head of a larger company or strong-willed, strong-minded entrepreneurs who have set up successful businesses.

For this reason alone, when you move into the chapter director's seat you need to be equally strong-minded and strong-willed because you are surrounded by like-minded people and, if you don't lead by example, you will soon find yourself being led by the members – a classic situation of the tail wagging the dog.

Sometimes inevitably, you will have to make decisions that not everyone is happy with and, in such situations, the long-established ethos of my Leeds North Chapter in doing things by the BNI rule book, ensures that even difficult tasks are made easier.

The main reason why any franchise breaks down is when you ignore the turnkey operation. Our turnkey operation is the fixed 20-point weekly meeting agenda which I believe, should be closely followed.

This agenda comes with its own rule book which starts by requiring members to arrive before 7am and to make sure that if they cannot attend, they send a substitute.

When I took over as Chapter Director, it was apparent some members were not following the rules, nor were they committed to BNI's philosophy, so we took the view that if they could not even find a substitute for meetings they were unable to attend, or if they were clearly not performing, their membership would be terminated.

Chapters that work are those which follow the 20-point agenda and, at the end of each breakfast I collect every business card and e-mail all those who attended – members and guests – with a summary of key information from the meeting and general news about members, and perhaps issue a gentle

## What makes YOUR group special

CONTINUING our new regular feature, this issue's column highlights the views of individual chapter directors on what makes their group different, and discovers some 'secrets' for making groups more effective – not least by boosting membership numbers. While there is just one optimum way of running a chapter – and that is the tried and tested BNI way – every UK and Irish chapters has its individual character, based not least on the style of its chapter director and how he or she imposes their personality on the weekly agendas. Here, directors offer their ideas on best practice and their solutions to occasional problems that can arise.



• Tony Tickle

warning in the event of any bad practices creeping into our meetings.

Sometimes I will e-mail members two or three times a week, and there is no doubt that in addition to motivating them and keeping everyone's mind firmly focused on BNI business, it vastly improves two-way communication with our members.

Adopting the philosophy that if you prune a rose bush it will grow back stronger and healthier, we shed several members who weren't pulling their weight before a slimmer, fitter chapter set about finding new and more committed replacements.

As a result, we have grown from 26 to 36 members in barely ten weeks and my goal is for the chapter to become 40-strong before my term ends.

• Philip Hopkins runs H2 Communications, a Leeds-based PR consultancy. He can be contacted on 0113 250 0071.

## MAKE NEW members feel welcome in your group, says Tony Tickle (Bolton Chapter)

The prospect of joining a Chapter can be very daunting. As a visitor you look around the meeting and are impressed by the ease with which the members refer and discuss business. Sometimes new members find it difficult to move into the 'fast lane' of meeting and generating referrals.

At Bolton we have introduced a method of 'mentoring' new members,

and the system has shown itself to have many benefits. Here's how it works. From the moment a new member has been welcomed into the group, the Chapter Director allocates three mentors to them. The profile of those mentors is usually a long-standing member, another recently-joined member and a third, whose business – and business network – is entirely different to that of the newcomer.

The long-standing member brings all that you would associate with BNI, including background experience and knowledge of the Chapter.

The new member is fresh and has experienced the pains of joining, and so can bring comfort, building on new member networks within the Chapter.

The member with a very different business network is perhaps the most beneficial of all the mentors because new members often find it difficult to move outside of their own business environment.

Recently, for example, one of our new members whose business is in manufacturing lightweight concrete sections for the construction industry, was matched with a member who specialises in colour co-ordination for dressing to impress. A pretty fruitless match, or so it might initially seem.

The new member wanted contacts in multi-national and corporate businesses – decision makers and personnel who influenced the purchase of his services. So what could a colour consultant possibly offer him? Surprisingly enough, she could help in every area, because she works as a consultant to senior managers, advising them on better personal presentation to gain the edge in business.

Making new members feel comfortable in the group is crucial to how they perform, and this fast track method has proved very successful with our Chapter. The mentors do not know in advance that they are being chosen; they are not asked before their name is announced, and this too can create new networks for established members. You should try it sometime.

• Tony Tickle is Managing Director of The Tickle Group, specialising in new media services, based at The Gate House, Summerseat, Bury. Telephone 01706 823456.



**MUM'S THE WORD:** Manchester dietician Norah Lane (right) with one of the women she has helped become pregnant through her healthy eating programmes.

## How BNI can help to make you pregnant

BNI is great for improving your business. But did you know it is now helping a growing number of women become pregnant – many after years of infertility?

Diet expert Norah Lane had been successfully helping infertile women in the North West to lose weight for some years but, as a result of recently joining Manchester Bridgewater Chapter, her expertise is suddenly in demand nationwide, with hundreds of women queuing for her help – the first of whom have now conceived after years of childlessness.

"My business has just gone through the roof since joining BNI," Norah told *SuccessNet*.

"From the start, I decided that I wouldn't push my professional services because I knew my colleagues would need to get to know me first, so I wore my other hat – that of fundraiser – and asked for referrals to organisations who might like me to stage a charity talk about my work, to help them raise money.

"The solicitor in Bridgewater Chapter, Paul Johnson, responded by asking me to address his Round Table group in Bury and my talk on men's health problems and how diet could help them went down very well.

"One of the audience worked in local radio and suggested my work with infertility would be a good topic for his colleague, Janet Kennedy, who presents a show

on BBC's GMR station."

The station was inundated with calls – over 400 women sought Norah's help – but far more was to come. The *Manchester Evening News* then picked up her story, ran a page feature and another 600 women telephoned the modest Denton-based offices of Norah's slimming clinic, Vitaline.

More radio appearances, a story in the *Daily Express* and a New Year interview on Granada TV quickly followed.

"In total we've received several thousand calls, and dozens of new members have joined our programmes – and it's all due to BNI," said Norah.

More significantly, among the first of the avalanche of women pursuing her dietary solution to pregnancy, were four ladies who had commenced medication prior to receiving IVF treatment, only to find themselves pregnant as a result of losing weight, without undergoing the costly assisted reproduction.

"One of them had been trying for 13 years to have a baby, but with my diet she has now conceived naturally," she added.

Norah is now looking to franchise Vitaline because of the volume of potential business from all over the country.

Norah Lane can be contacted on 0161 292 4918 or via Vitaline's website: [www.vitaline-slimming.com](http://www.vitaline-slimming.com)

# INNOVA

## BNI's key role in s

**I**magine being able to talk with 200 business colleagues or friends anywhere in the world at the same time.

Now, imagine that as well as talking among themselves, everyone can also see each other (in real time) through their computer screens.

And finally, imagine what it would be like to do this for a one-off cost of just a few pounds.

Sounds too good to be true? You'd better believe it because, as *SuccessNet* went to print, so a whole BNI chapter in Leeds was about to help one of its members, software developer Stewart McLean, launch what is set to become the world's most exciting computer development since the Internet – destined to transform the way we do business, and the way we live.

Stewart's company, CybaHous Ltd of Batley, has spent 15 months designing a software programme that enables anyone to have simultaneous face-to-face conversations with up to 200 people in different locations, providing pin-sharp pictures and clear sound for everyone linked into the call.

And, because the system – called 'Eye-D-Me' – utilises the Internet, and

requires only a simple microphone, it will provide voice and vision communication around the globe for a fraction of the cost of business which all un-metered connections as well as to millions of users who pay a fixed charge for constant

From the end of January customers will be able to 'D-Me' for less than create 'free' sound-connections between themselves or business colleagues at other locations anywhere.

More people/locations to any individual's PC simply by purchasing the software. Business software will be launched

As a founder member of Armouries (Thursday) has used the paid for development of his software and openly acknowledges their fantastic support nowhere near launch

He told *SuccessNet* leagues have been busy their time, expertise



**BREAKTHROUGH:** Stewart MacLean (standing) puts the first call through the new Eye-D-Me software, with Craig Hardcastle (left) at the computer.

# ATION ALL ROUND

## software revolution

simple web cam and a will provide totally free communications for tens of thousands who already have connection to the Internet, millions of private individuals fixed monthly ISP Internet access.

of January, personal able to purchase 'Eye-D-Me' for £25 and instantly and-vision links selves and friends, relatives and colleagues in up to five anywhere in the world.

Locations can be added to the Eye-D-Me network, allowing further copies of business versions of the software to be launched in the spring. A member of the Leeds (Thursday) Chapter, Stewart McLean, and unpaid services of BNI colleagues in the region. His unique software, he acknowledges that "without your support, we would be launching the product."

SuccessNet: "My chapter colleague brilliant, many giving advice and practical assistance

free of charge. Because of them, we've been able to accelerate our launch by several months."

As a reward for their support, every one of the Chapter's 40-strong membership, has been given individually tailored advance copies of the new software, with the opportunity to try it in their different business environments for a month before it goes on sale.

'Eye-D-Me' is likely to provide major new networking and educational opportunities for BNI.

In the short term, for instance, individual chapters and/or groups of members will be able to communicate 'live' with each other – enabling several chapters to participate in joint educational or training sessions.

Abbey National's Jeff Matthews said: "The ability to communicate face to face with more than one person anywhere in the world, has real advantages over video conferencing. It appears to offer a major advance in Internet and computer technology."

• **Any BNI member interested in trying the new software should contact Stewart McLean at CybaHous Ltd on 01924 500999.**

## No recession for Champagne Eddie

TWO YEARS ago, Eddie Barnes made his living out of photocopiers. Today he sells more champagne than any other drinks supplier in Kent. But, while bubbly might seem a riskier commodity than copiers, business is booming!

"We've doubled our turnover in the last year," said Eddie, "and if there is a recession coming, no-one's told my clients. It's also a lot more fun."

Eddie likes a good laugh in his Medway Chapter and, just before Christmas, he had double reason to chuckle: his largest single order to date, 400 bottles of quality fizz for the British Comedy Awards on London's South Bank – and then being a guest at the event.

"The referral came through my chapter. My tender was accepted – and they invited myself and my wife as guests. It was a great night – and the first time I'd been paid to drink my own champagne!"

• **Contact Eddie at The Champagne Cellar on 0800 597 7122.**



Eddie is finishing touches to (left) and Ian Hardcastle.

## Business where you least expect it...

TWO ORIGINAL members of Tunbridge Wells Chapter who thought they would never work with each other, have found themselves doing a veritable feast of unexpected business across the weekly breakfast table.

In the chapter's early days, independent financial adviser Graham Adams would enviously eye the huge potential client base of his chapter colleague Denise Barnes, who runs one of Kent's largest estate agencies, and wish he had access to her clients.

However, she seemed perfectly happy referring her customers to a major national financial services group, and so she dismissed the idea of finding business through her.

"The reality was that both Denise's financial specialists and my practice, The Reeve Alexander Partnership, were selling very similar financial packages to clients, so I couldn't see any reason why she would direct her clients to me," said Graham.

Two years ago, however, the then Chapter Director decided to strengthen business rapport and networking between different members of the chapter, by requiring everyone to have lunch with a colleague, based on drawing 'pairs' of names out of a hat.

"By a twist of fate I was drawn with Denise, and while we both laughed about the irony and thought nothing would come from it, we agreed to have lunch anyway," Graham added.

It was a wise decision. Over lunch, he learned that Denise was less than enthusiastic about retaining links with her long-term financial associates, and more than interested in looking at his consultancy as a successor to whom she could refer her many clients. Graham explained his range of services, and the two agreed they could do business after all.

Since then, Denise has referred more than £150,000-worth of business to Graham, and regularly passes him a handful of referrals over the breakfast table each week.

"It was a totally unexpected source of new business," Graham added, "and I am so pleased we decided to have lunch. Although I cannot match Denise's flow of referrals, I do my best to find her business as well."

Denise, whose chain of offices covers a large part of Kent said: "I'd always joked with Graham that he couldn't expect to receive any referrals from me and, when I was drawn to have lunch with him, my first inclination was to put his name back in the hat and choose again."

But we agreed to meet up and over lunch I told Graham I'd been thinking about changing our financial advisers. He told me about his new consultancy and it seemed to offer a good alternative.

"In practice I am much happier with the new arrangement and, because we meet through BNI every week, it is easier to build trust and understanding, and to deal with any client problems that might arise."

"And, although I never thought we'd do business together, Graham passes quite a lot of business our way, so I'm very pleased we stuck to that lunch appointment."

Robert French, BNI's Regional Director commented: "This is a perfect example of BNI's philosophy that who you know is far more important than who you are, or what you do. I'm delighted to see such healthy two-way business flowing from the least expected quarters."

Graham can be reached on 01732 500505 and Denise on 01892 534433.



## Why women need BNI

**B**NI needs many more women members. More to the point, many women should be using BNI to help re-launch careers that have been put on hold while they raised families and fulfilled domestic roles.

So says Danusia Malina-Derben, one of life's "irrepressibles" who, as well as being mother of six children and wife of a military officer, now heads up a fast-growing West Midlands' life-coaching consultancy which teaches senior business executives that "you can have everything, if you want it badly enough."

Danusia recently joined BNI's Malvern Hills Chapter as part of a new strategic plan for her own future, which saw her relinquish a successful post in academia with imminent prospects of a professorship, in order to re-balance her "life priorities" and combine a rewarding career with fulfilment as a mother and wife.

"Before joining BNI I did my research, talking with several chapters about how women who are working mothers, managed to fit weekly early morning meetings into their existing domestic and business schedules. I also spoke with a number of women in BNI who had obviously managed to create support strategies to avoid absence from meetings.

"Having done my homework, I had no doubt that the benefits of BNI would far outweigh any minor practical problems and after just a few months membership, the value of BNI to my own business has been confirmed. But it is impossible not to notice how most chapters are dominated by men – probably because many women see early morning business breakfasts as prohibitive once children are on the scene."

Danusia added: "I would like women to recognise that they can be committed to business success without compromising their success or responsibilities as a mother. The two need not be in constant competition, and the right attitude is crucial. Positive action that backs up this attitude makes the difference between women who talk about wanting business success, and those who actually have it."

Drawing on her professional experience, she told *SuccessNet*: "If prospective female members of BNI focus on potential problems of membership, they will undoubtedly find such difficulties but, if they focus on business success through BNI, they will find ways of removing obstacles and turn the vision of success into reality. In short, if women want the best of both worlds badly enough, they will get it."

The fact that many women decide they have to make a choice between careers or family is, says Danusia, a reflection of long-standing cultural and social traditions. "Too many women



• Danusia Malina-Derben

suffer an identity blur, giving much of themselves away to other people – not least their partners and their children. Consequently, it is not unusual to see their careers being relegated to a very low priority, since the more that women sacrifice for others, the less they have to give of themselves."

She has produced a six-point strategy to help women get the most from BNI membership (see panel left) and hopes more chapters will become pro-active in attracting female members – not least by targeting women business owners with invitations to attend visitors days. "It is in every chapters' interest to seek the best possible mix and balance of members because diversity fosters creativity and growth. BNI is an ideal platform from which women can re-launch their dormant business careers."

Anyone who thinks Danusia must have a secret army of helpers to juggle her commitments, is mistaken. "I've no family or relatives in the area to rely on, my husband has his own full-time demanding job and three of my six children still live at home. You can do almost anything, if you want to. My message to would-be female members is: 'The only thing standing between you and business success is yourself.'"

• Danusia Malina-Derben is Managing Director of executive personal coaching consultancy, *Life Wizards*. She can be contacted on 01684 566720 or 561857.

### Danusia's strategy for success in BNI

DANUSIA'S six-point strategy for prospective women members:

You need to consider BNI membership with a positive mental attitude since, unless you think you think you are capable of doing something, it won't happen. Try this simple approach:

- Create a work and life strategy, by asking yourself what are the most important things to you right now, and how you can best achieve them.
- Decide where BNI membership fits into your strategy, and seek advice from other women members (and men) about how they balance family and career commitments.

• Harness the interest of business colleagues, suppliers and friends, with the aim of finding two or three reliable people who can substitute for you at meetings, if and when needed.

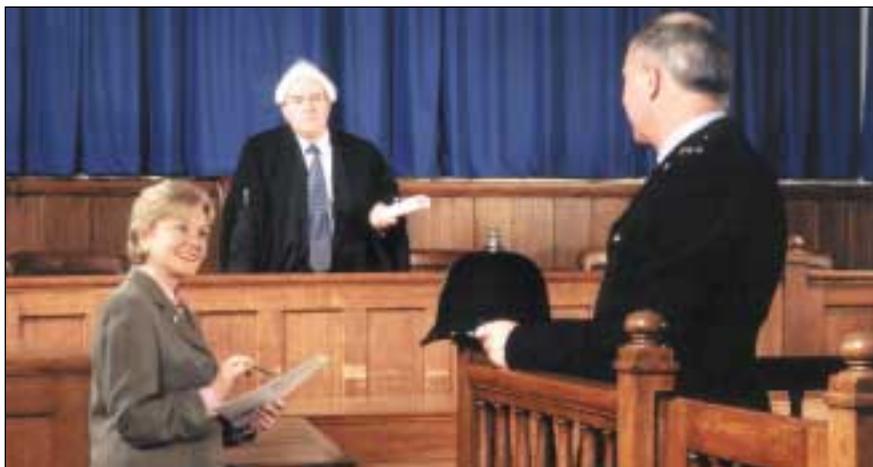
• Cultivate friendships in your community among people who have wide social and business 'contact' networks, such as members of the clergy, emergency services etc.

• Go into BNI having identified something positive you can contribute to your chapter.

• And finally, don't be reluctant to use professional expertise – such as a personal life coach – to help you achieve exactly what you want from work and life!



## Members in the dock!



**SILENCE IN COURT!** 'PC' Allan Heggs commands attention from would-be 'Judge' John O'Malley and court clerk Frances Heggs (his wife) as they familiarise themselves with their IFA practice's new magisterial surroundings.

**W**hen it comes to reaching the right verdicts for his clients, independent financial adviser Allan Heggs should have a head and shoulders advantage over the opposition: his 'office' is the historic former magistrates court at Lutterworth – newly refurbished with a lot of help from his BNI colleagues.

"It is one of the oldest traditional courts in the country and, because it's also a listed building we had to be very careful in converting it to offices. For this reason, we've left most of the original court furniture in place – including the magistrates' bench, the lawyers' benches and of course the prisoner's dock – and it was made easier by working with so many trusted colleagues," said Allan.

One of six practitioners in the expanding Leicestershire independent financial consultancy, Silverside Financial Services, Allan acquired the old magistrates court building 12 months ago after outgrowing the office extension at his own home, and it has taken nearly a year to complete the transformation.

"I belong to Leicester Oadby Chapter and I thought that between us and our neighbouring Leicester Tigers Chapter, we should find all the help we needed, and that's what's happened."

In total, no less than ten members of the two chapters have been involved in Silverside's magisterial move. Re-wiring of the 140-year old building was done by Tony Smith from Blaby Electrical Services and a member of the Tigers Chapter whose colleague, Stuart Muir from Intelligent Services carried out all the computer networking. Other Tigers' input came from Gordon Tilley whose Creative Design Unit redesigned the consultancy's stationery, and Rex Kellett from K&S Digital Imaging who made large sepia reproductions of old courtroom images, now gracing the walls.

Meanwhile, Oadby's contributions came from Ron Campbell-Barnard, whose firm Signs Express produced the external signage, photographer William James from Target Studios who used the building's historic features to dramatic effect in creating new photography for the practice, Michael Fell of Rushkington Lodge Kitchens who provided their culinary facilities, Suri Gudka of Business Services who met all the printing requirements and solicitor Andrew Eagle from Josiah Hincks Sons & Bulough whose legal and conveyancing skills were in considerable demand.

• **Allan can be reached at Silverside on 01455 557501.**

## Pavarotti in Coventry

**W**orld-famous opera singer Luciano Pavarotti paid an unexpected visit to Coventry Chapter just before Christmas – and left members gasping in amazement and delight as he serenaded them over breakfast.

Well, to be honest, it wasn't Pavarotti, but an uncannily realistic look-alike in entertainment impresario Barry Long (pictured right), who'd joined the Chapter less than a month earlier, and was determined to make his first ten-minute presentation to colleagues and visitors a very grand and memorable affair.

"He certainly succeeded," said BNI Assistant Director Louise Moore. "The Chapter was holding a visitors day and without exception, everyone had beaming faces when Barry came out, looking and sounding exactly like the real Pavarotti as we were treated to a fabulous rendition of 'O Sole Mio'."

"The moment was a vision to behold, and Barry's lifelike performance really lifted our spirits on a cold and grey Wednesday morning," she added.

Barry said his choice of Pavarotti – from an extensive repertoire of impersonations – was not difficult. "Everyone tells me I look like Pavarotti, and so I've studied the great man's mannerisms and think I bear more than a passing resemblance to him – although sadly my voice is not a patch on his."



His company, LRS Productions (Entertainment Specialists), is probably unique in being able to offer almost any kind of entertainment to a client, in any location. "I started life as a DJ and it just grew from there. Today, we can stage literally any kind of show anywhere, and we do almost everything ourselves, from building the sets and providing the props and floral arrangements, to writing, producing and choreographing the show and providing all the artistes."

Barry was introduced to BNI by his bank manager who thought it would lead to extra business very quickly. "He was absolutely right. After barely a month, I've had lots of business come through BNI – probably because, whether someone wants a cabaret, club night or casino, a pub-style event, dance band or pantomime, we can provide it. I just wish I'd heard of BNI years ago."

• **Contact Barry at LRS Productions on 02476 714523.**



# Around the Chapters

## Good deal of help

**A**fter nine years as General Manager of one of Plymouth's best-known hotels, Jeremy Palmer didn't think twice when the opportunity to buy the 72-bedroomed Victorian building came up.

And who better to help him than the Director of the city's new Astor Chapter, which had been launched in the hotel just a few weeks earlier!

Together with three of his senior hotel executives, Jeremy has just completed a smooth and successful management buy out of The Duke of Cornwall Hotel, opposite the city's famous Pavilions, and he's happy to acknowledge that the deal was made significantly easier because it was brokered by Astor's first Chapter Director and financial expert Tricia Kennedy.

Jeremy, who has been associated with the hotel he now jointly owns for the past two decades, told *SuccessNet*: "The majority shareholder just announced one day that he wanted to sell out, and the four of us involved in the buy-out were given very little time in which to raise a substantial sum of money.

"By happy co-incidence, BNI's new Astor Chapter had just been launched and made its home at the hotel, so after a couple of weeks of looking in on the breakfast meetings, I thought I should become a member.

"Although I'd previously met Tricia and was aware of her capital-raising expertise, it was a very pleasant and timely surprise to discover that she was



**MANAGEMENT BUYOUT: Jeremy and Tricia at The Duke of Cornwall Hotel.**

the newly appointed Chapter Director. I thought she might be just the person to help arrange the funding."

Indeed she was, and her company – Business Cash Flow Solutions – wasted no time in assisting Jeremy draw up successful financial proposals.

She said: "A deal of this size can sometimes be a slow process, but in this case, knowing the hotel and being aware of the financial requirements, it was relatively quick and straight forward. It is also much easier for both parties involved if, as in this case, they have been able to build up trust beforehand."

Meanwhile, Jeremy is in no doubt that BNI has already paid big dividends.

"Obviously, being able to put the financial package together through a BNI colleague was a huge help, but I've already identified a number of other members whose services we'll need in the weeks ahead. I am finding our weekly meetings very useful."

Did he intend to persuade other local BNI chapters to relocate to his hotel? "I don't think that would be fair," he added. "As well as providing a home to Astor Chapter, we also host regular functions for the Chamber of Commerce and The Industrial Society. We've got to leave something for our opposition!"

• **Jeremy can be contacted on 01752 275851, and Tricia can be reached on 01752 206000.**

## Celebrating £1m with bangers and mash



**SHARING THEIR GOOD FORTUNE: Mike Browne hands over Chichester's cheque to Gillian Ploughman**

CHICHESTER Chapter has celebrated passing its first £1 million-worth of referrals by holding a bangers-and-mash lunch for local businesses in the town's Festival Theatre.

Nearly 80 members and guests took part in the event, when members decided to share their good fortune with the community.

Chapter Director Mike Browne presented a cheque for £250 to the town's St Wilfrid's Hospice, while a further £250 was raised for the Hospice during the lunch.

The Hospice's Gillian Ploughman was on hand to accept the donation and said: "Increasingly, charities depend upon the public's generosity, and it is becoming more difficult to keep up with our running costs. We much appreciate the generosity of BNI members."

• **For more information about BNI in Chichester, call Mike Hemsley on 01903 200528.**



## Like father, like son

**M**eet David Davies. He's the elder statesman in our photograph and the immediate past Director of Stockport 2 Chapter. And the other chap? Oh, he's also David Davies – the chapter's present director.

Confused? Well that's hardly surprising, since David (Leslie) Senior and David (Michael) the Younger – "please don't refer to me as Junior" – are BNI's first father and son chapter directors in the UK and Ireland – and quite possibly, the first anywhere in the world.

The improbable double act came about largely by accident, as David Michael explained to *SuccessNet*.

"After hearing about BNI, my father suggested that we should take a look. We paid a visit to Stockport 1 Chapter, and immediately decided BNI was a good idea. But, because our respective

professions (in financial services and telecommunications) were filled, the only way was to get into BNI was by creating another chapter – so with half a dozen business colleagues we set about building Stockport 2."

David Michael added: "The new group was launched a year ago and my father was its very successful first Chapter Director. When his term of office ended in the spring, a new director was elected and I offered to undergo training with a view to succeeding him, but things didn't go to plan. After running only a few meetings, the new director suddenly left, so my father was asked to stand in for a second term – which is how he came to hand over the reins to me."

Father and son they may be, but as both were quick to point out, their chapter leadership styles are very different. "It's for others to make the comparisons, not me," said current



**TWO FOR THE PRICE OF ONE: David Davies and...David Davies.**

Director David, "but I think it is very healthy for the group to experience contrasting styles of leadership."

David Leslie said: "When it was agreed that my son would take over from me, I made it very clear that I would take a back seat and not interfere in any way with the new leadership team's decisions. That's the way it has stayed and even when other members approach me as a kind of father-figure in the chapter, wanting advice on policy or procedural matters, I tell them they must talk to the new leadership team."

The two Davieses are in unison however when it comes to their enthusiasm for BNI membership. "We both believed it would be good, and it has been," said David Leslie. "As an IFA and first Chapter Director, I knew it would take a little while to build referrals but I established a series of one-to-one chats with every other member and took time to make sure they understood my business. Now BNI referrals account for at least 20 per cent of my income, I can count around 50 per cent of my chapter colleagues as personal clients, and I have an excellent volunteer sales team."

To complete the Davies' family's involvement with the chapter, David Leslie's son-in-law, Paul Cresswell is also a founder member, and gains regular referrals for his building and joinery business from both his in-laws.

"It's a great chapter in which everyone looks out for everyone else. The sense of camaraderie and desire to help each other is enough reason on its own to get out of bed at five in the morning," added David Senior.

• You can contact David (senior) on 01625 875698 or 07768 394263, and David Michael on 0161 480 7730.

## Networkers recognised



**ELEVEN OF BNI's** best networkers from the Dublin region have received unique recognition for their 'Giver's Gain' contributions over the past year – in the shape of limited edition prints, hand drawn by Fingal Chapter's designer Padraig Horgan.

The framed prints of Irish stately homes were presented at the recently-staged Dublin Members' Day, after Executive Director Pat Guiden had asked the membership of each of Dublin's then ten chapters to nominate one person from their chapter who most deserved a special prize for effective networking.

Sponsored by Michael O'Connor of finance brokers Finplan, a member of the city's Airport Chapter who presented the Giver's Gain Awards, the initiative drew a huge response from members. Graham Smith, another Air-

port Chapter member who acted as co-presenter said: "It was quite a close run thing in some chapters, where just one or two votes separated the nominees, and in the case of Pembroke Chapter, two nominees tied for the award."

Pictured with Michael O'Connor (back row, centre) are all 11 recipients. Front row (left to right, holding prints) are Philip O'Donoghue (Clontarf Chapter), Ulla Enkrust (Fitz 2), Paula Egan (Liffey), Ralph McMahon (Pembroke – joint winner) and Anthony Quinn (Baggot Street). Back row: Damian Gibbons (South Dublin), Jonathon Miller (Pembroke – joint winner), Eamonn Leahy (Airport), Pat King (Merrion Row), John Clarke (Dun Laoghaire) and Colum Whelan (Fitzwilliam).

# Use your sphere of contacts to maximise membership



says  
**BEVERLEY  
BLANDFORD**  
Executive Director,  
Home Counties  
West, Hampshire  
and West Country

**W**hile seasoned BNI members all know and realise that referrals do not only come from their own 'Contact Sphere', it may be hard for the new member or visitor to grasp this fact initially. What newcomers will understand and relate to, however, is getting referrals from someone who has a natural symbiotic relationship with their line of business.

So, to ensure that membership of BNI is both profitable and enjoyable from the outset, why not adopt the following strategy - specifically developed to promote stronger bonds and enhanced business within your 'contact sphere group' in your chapter.

First and most important, you need to identify the professions and trades within your Chapter whose representatives are in your own 'Contact Sphere' (i.e. they have a symbiotic relationship with your business). For instance, if you are an accountant, you should be talking to members in banking, independ-

ent financial advisory services, business consultancy, book-keeping and the legal sector - since all of these colleagues can refer business to you, as you can to them.

These 'symbiotic' groups or contact spheres of related trades and professionals can easily be identified in any chapter, and some of the most common examples are listed below. Start by compiling your own groups, and of course, you may need to add other categories.

- **FINANCIAL & LEGAL:** solicitor, accountant, IFA, banker, estate agent
- **PEN & PAPER:** printer, graphic designer, PR consultant, copywriter
- **MOTOR TRADE:** motor mechanic, bodywork repairer, garage proprietor
- **PROPERTY:** builder, plumber, carpenter, estate agent
- **HEALTH:** dentist, therapists, optometrist, alternative medicine
- **IT:** computer hardware, software developers, telecoms etc

Within your own group you now need to identify other trades and professions (not already represented in the chapter) that will help you grow and increase your chances of giving and getting quality referrals. Once your group has decided what categories of new member(s) are needed, elect a spokesperson to inform the Membership Co-ordinator who will set Chapter goals for targeting those categories for stack and visitor days.

At least once a month, arrange a strategy meeting with your 'Contact Sphere Group', which can take place after a chapter meeting. Your group's spokesperson needs to meet the Membership Co-ordinator on a regular basis, who in turn should inform the whole Chapter about the membership categories wanted by your individual group. This should be done at point 11 on the agenda which covers 'professions still needed' and 'Chapter growth plan'.

Most importantly the Membership Co-ordinator must specifically ask for contact names (i.e. the names of suitable visitors) from the Chapter and list the members who have volunteered names. Those members should be the ones who invite their respective nominees as visitors.

Whenever a guest visits your Chapter, if they are within your 'Contact Sphere Group' ask your spokesperson to stand up and invite them to stay on after the meeting to meet your group, because this is when the strategy is most beneficial and capable of producing the best results.

Last but not least, do not forget the reason you get up early for BNI meetings and why you have paid a membership fee! It is to network, make new contacts and do more business - so do send a follow up letter thanking your visitors for coming, invite them back for a second time and also enclose your brochure and business card. After all, this is a warm call for you and an opportunity not to be missed.

Remember, while BNI provides the vehicle for you and your business, you have to put petrol in to keep it running!

## Stanmore passes 10,000

STANMORE CHAPTER in North-West London notched up its 10,000th referral just before Christmas.

The landmark referral was passed by Andrew Bamford of The Investment Club Network to Rosemary Holmes of Beautiful Holmes.

Chapter Director Simon Patnick said: "This is a fantastic achievement in such a short period of time.

"More importantly for our members, it represents their finding over £2.3 million worth of business for each other. They simply cannot afford not to work for each other."

# They exist to ensure a smooth flight

**C**ast your mind back to the last time you flew on an aeroplane. Who made your flight enjoyable? Who was there to help you if you had any problems?

Who was there to serve you and provide nourishment when you were hungry or thirsty? In short, who, if they did their job well, made you walk off the plane wanting to travel with that airline again?

The answer is the flight attendants. In any airline, they have a vital job – to keep the passengers happy, give them what they want, and make sure they go away and tell their friends what a great airline they flew with.

BNI chapters have many similarities to a passenger aircraft and, many of the jobs in a BNI chapter closely parallel the jobs of a jetliner's crew. The plane is piloted by a highly trained team of pilots whose job it is to work together to see that it arrives safely at its destination.

A BNI chapter is piloted by a trained crew of team leaders, whose job it is to work together to see that the chapter arrives safely at its destination – namely, to ensure it grows to its potential, stays on course and develops the maximum amount of business for its members.

The flight attendants of a BNI chapter are its membership committee. Their job is to make sure that the members are happy and productive, to solve any problems that may occur on the way to their destination, to plan ahead and make sure that the group is prepared for the journey, and to monitor members' performance and progress to avoid potential pitfalls.

Just like the flight attendants, they have to make sure that the right people join the group (get on the plane) and sometimes, for the good of the group, even ask people to leave the group (just as unruly passengers would be put off an aircraft), and like their airborne counterparts, their job is sometimes given far less importance than it deserves. In fact, the membership committee is probably the most important group in any BNI chapter, and absolutely vital to the success of the group.

By  
**STEVE LAWSON**  
European Training Director

As a BNI Director I can tell you with absolute certainty that there are no good BNI chapters anywhere that do not have strong, functioning membership committees. And the converse is also true. Every BNI chapter that is struggling, invariably has a weak and inactive membership committee.

What then are some of the important tasks of the membership committee, and how should they be carried out?

Firstly, it is important to understand who runs your chapter. It is not the chapter director and it's not the leadership team. It is the membership committee that runs the chapter. The chapter director is there to make sure the weekly meetings follow the agenda, and the group follows the BNI programme at each meeting, and the secretary/treasurer administers the group's finances, and the membership co-ordinator wears two important hats.

It is his or her job to keep track of the participation of each member, and secondly, to enforce BNI's policies within the group through the membership committee, which the membership co-ordinator chairs. And as chairperson, he or she is also responsible for making sure that all the other important tasks of the membership committee are delegated and carried out.

Why do we monitor the participation of every member each month? Why do we keep track of referrals given and received, attendance, lateness, visitors brought, and so on? The answer is simple – it's called personal accountability.

A BNI chapter is not a social club. It comprises business people who pay annual fees to participate in an organisation that they are told will generate business for them. That is the main (but not the only) reason why they are there. They have a legitimate expectation of what they will get from their membership, and it is the responsibility of the leadership team and the membership committee to see that they get their money's worth!

Because everyone in the chapter has

a common goal of getting new business, so we all have a responsibility to do the things in the group that will lead to us reaching that goal. If we do things which prevent the group from maximising the business generated, then we are going to be a force for counterproductivity in the group, and this is going to have an adverse impact on every member of the group.

Therefore, for the common good of the group, every member should be accountable for their actions. If their actions assist in reaching the common goal, they should be encouraged to stay in the group. If their actions prevent the group from achieving its aims, and they are not prepared to change, then they should be asked to leave the group. That is a plain, straightforward business decision.

And this is why the membership committee monitors the participation of the members. Its job is to ensure the group reaches its common goal of maximising new business for members. A member who is too often absent, or not contributing to the common goal, is costing every other member of the group money in terms of lost potential. If the membership committee can't help that member to participate better (we can teach a "can't do", but we can't teach a "won't do"), then that person should be replaced with a member who will contribute to the group's objectives.

Every chair in your chapter is exclusively reserved each week for a particular person and it is too valuable to leave it occupied by a non-contributing member. That is what accountability is all about.

When you look at some of the other important functions that the membership committee also performs, like checking references of new applicants, planning for chapter growth, arranging social and networking activities and handling member issues, you begin to understand why it is so important.

The power of the membership committee – as delegated by BNI's policies and procedures – is what helps all members reach their common goal of developing more business for each other. That is why the membership committee is so important, and why we should never underestimate its value.

## Phil CAN talk

**F**OR a man who admits "I'd have died if asked to address a business audience just 12 months ago", Liverpool caterer Phil Brumfitt ain't done half badly!

The resident joker in city's Indigo Chapter, Phil has already gained £160,000 worth of extra business for his company, Windsors Catering Equipment, through referrals from his chapter colleagues.

"That would have been reason enough to be delighted with BNI," said Phil, "but what is just as rewarding is that I have gained so much more confidence and professionalism since joining.

"A year ago, I couldn't have addressed any audience, but thanks to BNI I am now asked to give talks to some of the city's leading business organisations, and amazingly, I actually enjoy it!

"After hearing me speak at a chapter meeting, one of our visitors identified herself as the Regional Chairman of the Institute of Management and I was asked to address her members.

"Then, as a result of that, I've just given a talk to the Institute of Business Advisers – something I never thought I could do.

"Without doubt, BNI has totally changed my life."

• **Phil Brumfitt can be contacted on 0151 666 1077 or 07880 518909.**

## Clerkenwell member's date with the Chancellor

HAVING just seen your business enter a new Government league table of top entrepreneurial inner-city companies, and been personally told by Chancellor Gordon Brown that "you're jolly good chaps", you'd think that was enough good news for one month.

But London Clerkenwell Chapter member Sion Whellans was far more excited about BNI than his audience with the Chancellor when *SuccessNet* caught up with him to offer congratulations. "We've just had some really good news," he said enthusiastically. "We've made a breakthrough by winning a contract with Greenpeace – something

we've wanted for a long time."

And his delight with BNI is the result of the breakthrough coming from the chapter he joined barely ten months ago when, like many newcomers, he had mixed feelings about whether it would work for his print and publications worker co-operative, Calverts, based in Shoreditch.

"We'd been advised by the chapter leadership team to be more specific in telling colleagues about the sort of businesses we wanted to work with. I mentioned Greenpeace, never thinking for a moment that anyone would have any senior contacts with them, but

to my amazement, two members gave me referrals into the organisation, and we're now handling a range of its print requirements," said Sion.

Meanwhile, he also admitted that BNI had contributed in no small way to his co-operative's success in joining the UK's Inner City 100 Index of fast-expanding inner-city companies.

• **Sion Whellans can be contacted on 020 7739 1474.**



**CO-OPERATIVE DIVIDEND:** Sion Whellans (right) discusses a projects with fellow director Paul Santer.

## Cathedral becomes a Castle!

NORWICH'S recently launched Castle Chapter is going from strength to strength – despite a last-minute pre-launch hiccup that saw the new group having to change its name!

With BNI's first Norwich chapter – Norwich City – already making a significant impact on the local business community, BNI's Norfolk leadership wanted another strong name for the city's second group, launched during the summer.

After much discussion among its core group, members settled on Norwich Cathedral Chapter, reflecting the strength and majesty of one of the city's most imposing landmarks.

"We sent out all the letters, inviting local businesses to attend Cathedral Chapter's launch and looked forward to the big day," said Executive Director for East Anglia, James Cruickshank. "However, one of the invitation letters landed on the desk of the local pest control expert, with the challenge: 'The Norwich Cathedral Chapter is looking for a pest control company to whom it can refer business...'

"Little did we know that the recipient had a longstanding contract with Norwich Cathedral, and when he received our invitation he mistakenly thought it was from his client. I'm told he stormed into the Dean of Norwich's office to express his anger that they were looking to replace his company after years of good service."

It took a placatory call from James to the Dean's office (and the unhappy pest control expert) to sort things out, when it was agreed it might be better to find a different name for the Chapter. He added: "We decided Norwich Castle was the next most memorable name, and so far we've had no calls from the Keeper at Norwich Castle. So, the moral to other new chapters is: do your research properly!"

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