



SuccessNet

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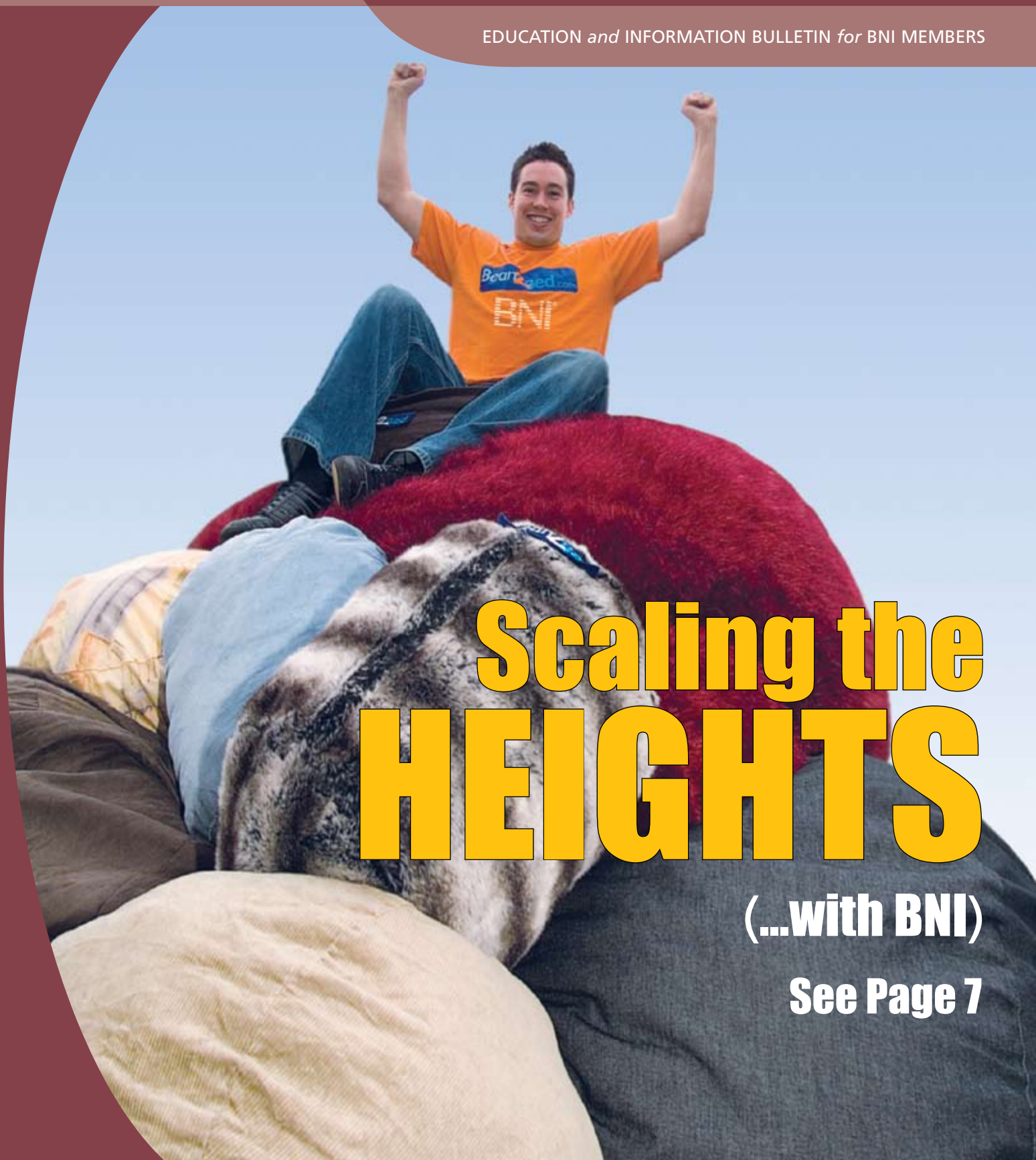
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in the Emerald Isle

ISSUE 45 | SPRING 2008

EDUCATION *and* INFORMATION BULLETIN *for* BNI MEMBERS



Scaling the HEIGHTS

(...with BNI)

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AND THE REFERRALS

16,000 REASONS FOR THOROUGHbred SUCCESS

When you've notched up an outstanding six years of networking success, you need a fitting venue to celebrate the occasion. So there was only one place to go when members of the Jack O'Newbury Chapter decided to mark their achievement with a lavish champagne reception: the Royal Box at the town's famous Racecourse.

Although the venue is more used to welcoming four-legged winners, members soon found the going to their taste, revealing that they have netted millions of pounds worth of business for each other since the group was launched.

During that time, they passed almost 16,000 referrals, gaining the Chapter a coveted Founder's Award and prompting Chapter Director Emma Smith to observe: "For some of our members, BNI has become the lifeblood of their businesses."

As the champagne flowed, so did members' success stories. One of the chapter's founders, Alan May from the Splash Group, announced he had £1M worth of reasons to celebrate because this was the value of business he'd gained through BNI for his conservatory and replacement windows company.

Even amongst Jack O'Newbury's newest members, success was the buzz word. Sharon Johnson, who runs Johnson Bookkeeping Services, said: "I joined to generate more business after taking on my first employee, and after just 12 months I've achieved more growth for my company than I did in the previous few years together! I've now taken on a second member of staff and moved to larger offices - all thanks to the business referred to me through BNI!"

The group (pictured above right) also has a strong sense of duty to the community, reflected by its recent presentation of a £300



cheque to Crossroads, a West Berkshire-based charity providing care for carers who will use the donation to buy bicycles for their holiday home. Funds to help local charities are raised by members from a weekly raffle held during their Friday breakfast meetings. •

The Jack O'Newbury Chapter meets at the Newbury and Crookham Golf Club and if you know someone who would benefit by filling one of its few remaining categories, contact Emma Smith at emma@dstressxpress.co.uk or Lucy Venables at: lucy@redprosper.com



400 NOT OUT and still going strong!

Andy Penfold is the kind of accountant that every business would love to have - but rarely find. Why? Because in addition to humanising what most of us regard as the worst aspect of running a business - keeping the accounts in order - he works constantly for his clients to resolve not only their other business problems, but also domestic and personal issues too!

As a founder member of the Bracknell Chapter in Berkshire, shortly to commence its ninth year, he has passed more than 400 referrals together worth several hundred thousands of pounds, and he happily acknowledges that most of these are the result of his taking a deep personal interest in existing and potential clients.

Andy (pictured above) said: "When I first meet a client, I spend some time getting to understand not just their business but their lives, family and domestic circumstances. Why? Because very often, even before we've finished our initial

discussions, I've identified several different problems or dissatisfactions which I know my chapter colleagues will be able to help them resolve.

"Ironically, it has sometimes resulted in my not actually gaining the client for my own firm, while finding very good referrals for one or more of my fellow chapter members. The added reward for me is knowing that I've been able to send him or her away happy, having often solved other business or personal problems as well as their accountancy needs," said Andy.

Despite his prolific record of finding valuable business for his Bracknell Chapter colleagues, he says the main benefit of BNI membership has come not from reciprocal referrals, but through being able to raise the profile of the Crowthorne-based practice, PKB Chartered Certified Accountants, for whom he works. "Naturally, I've gained some new business through the chapter over the years, but it's been about quality rather than quantity.

"The real value of my membership to the firm's partners is knowing just how much added value I can bring to our clients using my extensive BNI contacts. Accountancy is a very competitive market and it is important that we deliver exceptional levels of service. Happily, as a consequence of being able to refer our clients to my trusted chapter colleagues who can be relied on to meet their wider needs, we know we are giving them a first class service." •

Andy's prolific referral record was formally recognised at the regional big breakfast held in Reading last month, when he received a special award from BNI executive director Gavin Bain. He can be contacted on 01344 776225.

ENTERPRISE THROWS PARTY FOR 10TH BIRTHDAY

Members of Watford's Enterprise Chapter recently celebrated their 10th anniversary by staging a special visitors day when representatives of 20 of the town's key organisations joined them for a birthday breakfast that saw the meeting end with Chapter Director Sue Bryan handing out slices of birthday cake and glasses of champagne.

She said: "For over a decade, Enterprise members have met for breakfast every Wednesday. That adds up to an awful lot of bacon and eggs being consumed, but more importantly, many thousands of referrals being passed - which translates into many millions of pounds worth of business."

Office furnishings specialist Tony Maddison is just one Enterprise member to have profited greatly. He said: "BNI has been good for us. Last year we gained an additional £120,000 worth of business and I expect us to do at least as well this year." •



ANYONE FOR CAKE? Enterprise's leadership team with their 10th anniversary cake.

JUST KEEP FLOWING...

A FEAT OF CHURCHILLIAN PROPORTIONS

Members of Bromley's Churchill Chapter kicked off 2008 in spectacular style by notching up business worth a cool seven-figure sum!

The 35-strong south London group hit its landmark target in January, after members had taken barely 15 months to pass referrals topping £1 million – toasting their success in style with a lavish champagne breakfast.

Chapter Director Leighton Wilcox told SuccessNet: "I'm delighted we hit our million pound target during my time in the chair and, having since referred a further £100,000 of new business, we aim to achieve our next million even more quickly."

BNI Director Valerie Apps said: "There are 26 thriving BNI chapters in Kent, but only four others – Canterbury, Brands Hatch, Ashford and Whitstable – have reached their £1m target in the last year, so this is a tremendous achievement." •



SOMETHING TO SHOUT ABOUT! Members and guests savour the moment as Edgwarebury Chapter celebrates 10 years of success

Edgwarebury marks 10 years with £3.5m

The bubbly flowed when members of Bushey-based Edgwarebury Chapter recently celebrated their tenth anniversary with a champagne breakfast and the announcement that they have generated over £3.5 MILLION worth of business for each other in the past decade.

Among the guests at Edgwarebury's birthday meeting were the Mayor of Hertsmere, Councillor Martin Saunders, Hertsmere's M.P. the Rt Hon James Clappison, and BNI's UK National Directors Gillian and Martin Lawson, who were told that during 2007 alone, the chapter's 30 members had shared £529,557 worth of

new business from referrals passed across the breakfast table.

The Chapter's dynamism prompted James Clappison to remark: "This is certainly an inspiring group, and I'm very impressed by the range of services you offer – and the way you constantly seek new business for each other. You play an important role in the local business community" •

If you'd like to be part of Edgwarebury's continuing success, contact Melanie Silver on 01923 212048, or visit www.bni-edgwarebury.co.uk



BAGS OF REFERRALS! Pictured (L to R) with BNI director Valerie Apps (second left), are Churchill members Philip Holland-Clarke, Sue Elwood and Chapter Director Leighton Wilcox

Referrals! You just never know what they'll lead to ...

A casual remark during a business networking meeting has led to the boss of a Cheshire recruitment company gaining his most substantial client – thanks to the Giver's Gain commitment of a fellow BNI member.

Colin Lindsay of Gallery Recruitment in Northwich, who joined Stockport's Pyramid Chapter two years ago, has been appointed the preferred supplier of recruitment services to a national umbrella organisation representing 75 UK companies, ranging from specialist suppliers to major household names – a contract he thinks will soon be worth a healthy six figure sum.

Yet it almost never happened. He said: "Until recently, most of our work involved sales and marketing, but I wanted to expand into the transport and logistics sector so, last summer, I changed my 60-second presentations

and asked for referrals in those areas. Shortly afterwards, the chapter's management consultant Chris Parrack attended an unrelated networking meeting where one of those present was involved in transport logistics."

Chris took up the story. "Through my business, PSE Consulting, I'm aligned with a group of consultants who meet regularly, and since one of them works in transport logistics I sounded him out on Colin's behalf. He said they occasionally used recruitment firms but initially it did seem rather tenuous. However, I asked more questions, told him about Colin's work and how I thought he could give them a very good service...."

When he was eventually satisfied there was the prospect of business, Chris handed Colin the referral to his contact and told him they were expecting his call.



What a whopper! Smiles all round as Chris Parrack (left) hands the six-figure referral slip to Pyramid Chapter colleague Colin Lindsay

Colin added: "When I made that call, I never expected it would lead to a contract with potential earnings of over £300,000 during the next two years, and quite possibly more. It represents tremendous growth for us and will enable us to move up to bigger and better things. I've now got a big favour to repay to Chris for his persistence. It just shows that all referrals – however unlikely – need to be followed up, because you never know where they will lead." •

Contact Colin on 07795 976292 and Chris 07868 782398

LAWSON'S LORE

When the going gets tough, the tough get going – or so the old saying goes. And who are we to disagree, since recent months have seen a continued growth in our UK and Irish membership as more and more businesses come to recognise the unique benefits that BNI offers.

At times of even modest economic slow-down, such as the situation now being felt across much of the world in which business owners are being forced to re-evaluate their markets and their methods, it is reassuring to know that BNI represents one of the surest means of securing quality business for many companies – especially those in the small to medium enterprise sector where any downturn seems to hit particularly hard.

A few years ago, when we first conducted independent research into the value of membership, we were able to confirm that each member's seat at the breakfast table was worth, on average, more than £26,000 a year in terms of net business gained from referrals. But, in this issue of SuccessNet – as indeed in every edition – you will find examples of members having obtained substantially greater levels of new business through their BNI colleagues because, as the organisation has evolved and matured, we have also been able to maximise the potential value of membership.

While our growth is important, so too is the value-for-money that we offer to all members. No business organisation remains successful by standing still, and we are constantly striving to make the total BNI 'package' more attractive, more relevant and more beneficial to our members – key factors behind our new members' survey (see story opposite) whose results will help guide our further development over the next few years.

While the fundamental 'Giver's Gain' philosophy and business practices that have fuelled BNI's remarkable worldwide expansion over more than two decades, remain as valid today as they did at the start, our organisation will never hesitate to modify the way we support our members or revise its priorities IF we believe the outcome can make our members more successful. So, after assessing the online survey responses, you can rest assured we will take positive action on any proposals that could enhance the opportunities for personal development and the business growth of our members.

Meanwhile, last month's International Networking Week (see pages 6&7) reaffirmed the widespread recognition by business communities throughout the UK and Ireland, that BNI is a force to be reckoned with – and that membership is no longer just an option for any business serious about succeeding. ●

Martha Cullen

MAKING A GOOD THING BETTER

Members survey aims to give you even more of what you want from BNI

Thousands of members have responded positively to the organisation's first members survey for several years – designed to ensure BNI continues to deliver maximum business opportunities and increased profits to its 12,000 UK and Irish members.

Key results of the recent survey, aimed at our entire UK and Irish membership, will be shared with members through local directors (and future issues of SuccessNet), but initial indications suggest the vast majority of respondents are very happy with their overall BNI experience.

Conducted by Watford Enterprise Chapter member Jonathan Silverman of GSA Business Developments Ltd, the online questionnaire sought to establish how satisfied members are with a wide range of core membership objectives – from the quality of internal and external referrals they gained and the value of repeat or spin-off business, to the degree of support received from fellow members, chapter camaraderie, and skills training and personal development opportunities.

Members were asked to grade their answers from "extremely satisfied" to "not at all satisfied", as well as indicate the relative importance of different BNI benefits to their businesses.

It is hoped the survey will also provide an accurate indication about the total average value of referrals received annually, with members asked to specify how much additional turnover their business has gained through BNI in the previous 12 months, what proportion of their total and new business has been generated for them by chapter colleagues, and how they rate the overall value-for-money of membership which, as National Director Gillian Lawson explained, may soon offer further additional personal and financial benefits.



She said: "Any forward-looking organisation needs to periodically review how effectively it is delivering its services and meetings its own objectives. A mass survey of our members is one of the best ways to check how well BNI is performing, how satisfied our members are, and what if anything we could do to give our members even better value. In this context and subject to the results, we may also look at offering member discounts on certain goods and services."

Gillian added: "Whatever new initiatives we might launch, members can rest assured we will not lose sight of BNI's priorities to maximise members' business opportunities through mutually beneficial word-of-mouth networking, and provide first-class personal development and business skills training. Greater profitability is vital for every member, and the key benefit we will always offer is the opportunity to grow their bottom line through BNI membership." ●

HAVE YOU BOOKED FOR MEMBERS' DAY?

An important annual feature in the life of every BNI member should be the Regional Members' Day: the one event at which even your chapter's most shy and retiring representative is brought out of his or her shell and introduced to a host of new business ideas, personal development opportunities and, of course, even more new business potential than usual.

And with each passing year, more and more regions are staging bigger, better and more rewarding Members' Days, the largest of which are now routinely attended by up to 400 delegates from chapters based not only in the host region, but often from BNI groups

more than 100 miles distant. That's right – you are welcome to attend ANY regional members' day, not just your local event!

National Director Gillian Lawson said: "If there is one event in the year that we would hope all members will attend – beyond the regular training workshops and any joint chapter activities – it is their regional Members' Day, each of which offers delegates a fantastic wealth of new, as well as tried and tested business methods, and provides their best chance of the year to network with hundreds of other members, all of them keen to develop new business."



LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON IN MILTON KEYNES

The phrase 'Like father, like son' has taken on an extra significance for members of Milton Keynes' Sapphire Chapter, where incumbent Chapter Director Jim Reynolds has just welcomed his own son David into the group!

And as if that wasn't special enough, David's induction meant that Dad was presented with his Black Badge and entry to BNI's prestigious Gold Club, after introducing six new members to the 18-month-old chapter. Our photo (above) shows business adviser Jim (right) with David.

Jim said: "It was pure co-incidence that David became the sixth new member I'd introduced. I'd obviously chatted to him over the months about the benefits of BNI, but the timing of his decision to join was his alone - even though it was spot on!"

David added: "Of course I knew all about BNI because Dad was always telling me how good it was for business, but it was only after being made redundant last year and starting my own IT consultancy, 'Off & On', that I thought it would be a great idea to visit the Sapphire Chapter.

"I joined a few weeks later and incredibly won new business right from the start, since when I haven't looked back, with much of my early business coming from BNI referrals. Had I not joined, I'm in no doubt my new venture would still be struggling to get off the ground. It's helpful having a father who is a business consultant, but for all his good advice you still need customers - and that's what BNI has brought me." •

Contact Jim on 01908 373244 and David on 07894 759516.

Meanwhile, other newcomers to the Gold Club include five Sussex members - Nick Feeney (The Royal Chapter in Eastbourne who earned his badge within two months of the group's launch), Ian Mitchell (Chichester), Gerry Ori (Cuckmere), John Robinson (Brighton Pavilion) and Sarah Riley (Shoreham Harbour). They join Sonia Bowles (New Heights, Leeds), Robert Umpleby (Enterprise, Bedford) and Sean Ware of Cork City Chapter.

Who said experience only comes with age!? Try telling that to Ryan Bowskill who, at the age of 20 is now completing his tenure in the director's chair of Workshop's Turbine Chapter.

In fact when recruitment consultant Ryan was offered the position of Chapter Director last October he was still a teenager, and had completed half of his six months chairmanship before he turned 20 - almost certainly making him BNI's youngest-ever chapter director in the UK.

Not that such a burden would be likely to bother a young man who leapt at the chance to join BNI after attending a networking event in Barnsley, where he heard Turbine's then chapter director singing the organisation's praises. He said: "I went along to the group's next meeting and had already decided I wanted to join when I heard another recruitment firm was about to submit an application. I've never completed forms so quickly in my life, but I handed mine in first - and the rest is history."

That was barely 18 months ago, since when Ryan's impact has reflected his chapter's name - first marking his 19th birthday by becoming Turbine's Events Co-ordinator, then winning the chapter's award for passing the highest number of referrals in a month no fewer than six times, and finally being invited by the Membership Committee to move into the hot seat last autumn.

"They seemed to think they were throwing me in at the deep end but I relished the chance to inject some youthful enthusiasm and energy into the role and I'd like to think it has worked," said Ryan. "The experience of our more senior members and the exuberance of the chapter's younger element seems to have created an ideal blend and, after losing quite a few members in the preceding month, we've now boosted membership by 60% during my time in the chair, with the volume of referrals and new business now looking much more healthy."

Had he felt wary about taking on the chapter's leading role after barely a year in BNI? "There really wasn't any time to be reflective about it," he said. "I'd like to think that my youthfulness was a key reason in my being asked to become director so early in my BNI life, because they wanted a lively approach and happily, everyone has responded very well to the group's new dynamics."

As Business Development Manager for his father's company, Bowskill International Recruitment, Ryan acknowledges that what he lacks in years and experience, he's been able to make up for by working in a demanding HR industry. He added: "Every day I deal with people from all walks of life, so my chapter colleagues didn't hold too many surprises for me - other than good ones, in the shape of some useful referrals!" •



Ryan is Turbine's teenage Troubleshooter!

YOUR SEAT

Among the forthcoming regional Members' Days are:

18 April: Yorkshire. Cedar Court Hotel (near Junction 39 of M1).

16 May: Sussex. Hickstead Showground, Sussex.

27 June: Cheshire & North Wales. Ramada Hotel, Chester.

10 October: Kent. Brands Hatch Conference Centre.

18 October: South-West Ireland. Cork.

24 October: London. Marriott Hotel, Heathrow.

You can get the latest information about all UK member activities by logging onto the events section of our European website at www.bni.eu - and if your region isn't listed, ask your BNI director for details. •

THAT WAS THE WEEK THAT WAS!

BIG BREAKFASTS – BIG NETWORKING – BIG BUSINESS



ABERDEEN AWARDS: It's all smiles from highflying members in the northern Scotland as they gather to celebrate the region's top performers at the Granite City's big breakfast.



THE REHEARSAL'S OVER: A trio of the North East region's best 60-second presenters join forces to entertain delegates at Newcastle's big networking event.



WOT A LOT WE GOT! There were awards aplenty on display at the Notts & Lincs Region networking spectacular and, as our picture shows, plenty of happy recipients too!



THE BEST OF THE BEST: East Anglia's finest line up at Norwich's Holiday Inn, after receiving awards for their outstanding performances over the past 12 months.

They came, they networked and, by golly, didn't they do some big business! From our most westerly chapters in Cornwall and Cork, to northerly outposts in the Scottish Highlands, members marked last month's International Networking Week with a host of high-octane breakfast events. A key priority was to bring together key players and local business organisations from both the public and private sectors, with the aim of broadening their knowledge of BNI and establishing long-term business partnerships. Here, SuccessNet looks at a few highlights from the Week.

BIG NUMBERS:

Several regions saw even larger numbers turning out for this year's events, among them nearly 300 members who arrived at East Anglia's 'Big Breakfast' in Norwich, paying tribute to their 'Best of the Best' – with 21 members receiving awards, including Heather Sonnet who won the coveted Chris Norman Award for Excellence, honouring the memory of the much-admired former director who worked tirelessly to grow BNI across the region. A mortgage specialist, Heather earned the honour for her work in helping to transform one of the area's smallest groups, Lark Valley Chapter in Bury St. Edmunds, into one of its most successful.

Records tumbled at Kettering Conference Centre, where over 250 members from 15 chapters (70% off the region's membership) gathered for the Northants & Leicestershire Region's biggest-ever breakfast meeting and celebrated with the news that between them, they had passed more than 20,000 referrals during the previous 12 months.

London's Big Breakfast also topped last year's success with over 350 delegates – despite a couple of near disasters, the first when guest speaker, England cricketer Mark Ramprakash cried off with flu, leaving his replacement, BBC 'Today' presenter, Garry Richardson to gather the plaudits for a colourful talk on networking in business. Then, when the video conferencing link with BNI Founder and Chairman, Dr Ivan Misner failed, only quick thinking by Executive Director Laura Hurren saved the day – dialling up Ivan from her own mobile and holding a microphone against the handset for his contribution to be relayed via the hall's speaker system! "Despite the improvisation, his session still held us all spell-bound," she said.

BIG NETWORKING:

In a week dedicated to networking, organisers of Avon and Monmouth's Big Breakfast were determined to give BNI's profile a huge lift so, in addition to inviting representatives from many of the region's other business and networking organisations, they arranged for local radio station, Star FM to broadcast its morning programme direct from the Bristol hotel venue, interviewing members with business success stories to tell.

Forging new links with other business organisations was the theme at the North East Region's breakfast in Newcastle when 150 members and visitors welcomed guest speaker Joanne Armstrong from The Princes Trust, who highlighted the business and promotional opportunities for BNI members to get involved with the Trust's work in mentoring young newcomers to business. Over 30 members from local chapters registered their interest in becoming mentors.

Northern Scotland's two regional events in Glenrothes and Aberdeen were each attended by 200 delegates, and networking was so enthusiastic that sessions over-ran until almost lunchtime before organisers had to draw proceedings to a close! Many new worthwhile contacts were made, and several BNI members went away confident of completing significant new business deals.

BNI PUTS MATT ON TOP OF THE WORLD



NOTABLE NETWORKERS IN NORTHANTS: Fifteen of our best performers line up for the camera during Northants & Leics region's big networking event in Kettering.



THAT WAS FUNNY: Entertainment was high on the list for delegates attending London's huge breakfast event at the MCC's Lords headquarters.

When you bring together Scotland's top four business networking organisations, you are guaranteed the year's best opportunity to make contacts and identify potential business. So it was in Edinburgh where, for the first time, BNI joined forces with members of the Federation of Small Businesses, Business Network Scotland and The Small Business Club to share networking ideas and discuss ways in which the groups can forge fruitful partnerships. Similar events may now be held annually.

BIG WINNERS:

Around 200 members and a significant number of visitors from other business organisations turned out for the Notts & Lincs regional breakfast at the Newark Showground when awards were presented to more than a dozen of the region's top performing chapters and individuals, one of whom, web designer Mark Jarvis gained the title of Chapter Director of the Year, for his achievements with Lincoln's Olympians Chapter spanning several years.

Meanwhile 100 miles south, members of Hemel Hempstead's Gade Valley Chapter had plenty to shout about when colleague Julie Mole was awarded the Region's prestigious Member of the Year Award at the Herts & Beds regional event. Director Phil Berg commented: "Julie's performance has been outstanding. She has brought 44 visitors, introduced new 14 members, never been absent without a substitute, attended 12 training workshops and given 318 referrals – a quite exceptional record."

And a fitting conclusion to the Week!

Birmingham furniture designer Matt Roberts had experienced his crucial 'Eureka' moment as a poor university student, but it was only after joining BNI two years later that his award-winning business venture really took off – and how!

Like all good ideas, his space-saving 'bed in a beanbag' concept was simple, inspired by a frustrating weekend when he and co-creator Irfan Badakshi hit the problem encountered by every student: How to accommodate several friends in your tiny college room.

"We came up with the notion of putting a bed inside a range of brightly coloured beanbags, creating the ideal dual-purpose furniture – a comfy 'chair' for everyday use, converted in seconds to a comfortable double guest bed," said Matt.

Having patented, manufactured and started marketing their product, the priority was to become profitable as fast as possible. He added: "When we launched 'Bean2Bed Ltd' in 2005, we'd funded everything on student loans and credit cards so it was high risk. But it wasn't until two years later while sharing my business frustrations with a friend that things changed dramatically. He told me about BNI, I visited a chapter and knew it was the way forward. So I joined, promising my sceptical partner that if it didn't work, I'd repay the fees from my own pocket."

From the start, Matt never thought this was going to be necessary, and he was right. After barely five months as a member of Birmingham's Sunrise Chapter, he has:

- Won his business a high-profile advertising campaign after chapter colleagues showed him how to integrate Google's AdWords marketing system into his company, leading to his earning Google's 'Local Hero' award - and a major advertising programme involving billboards, radio commercials, bus-stop posters and a direct mail campaign.
- Been named Young Networker of the Year in the Midlands Business Awards as a result of his involvement with BNI and support from members, one of whom - chapter director Sue Bevan – provided the powerful testimonial for his winning application.
- Gained a vital place for his products in a major trade furnishings catalogue, through "a wonderful referral" from the chapter's printer Mike Gates. "Having produced the catalogues for a leading

national supplier, Mike then gave me the referral that has opened the door to a whole new world of business through interior designers and contract furnishing clients."

- Received a £4,000 new business grant via another referral that introduced him to Business Link, the regional business sponsorship body. He said: "It has allowed us to expand faster and further and, because we're spending the money on a new website that will enhance our sales side, it is worth many times its face value."

Matt added: "I owe a huge debt of gratitude to BNI since had I not joined, none of these great things would have happened. Instead of having our products in some of the country's best-known stores and a growing order book, we'd still be trying to find the most effective way forward on limited resources. BNI has given us a worldwide business platform and I would love to discuss new business ideas with any members who may be interested in expanding with us." •

Contact Matt on +44(0) 121 616 5178

Matt Roberts can afford to toast his success, after a fantastic business boost from BNI



EVERYTHING LOOKING GOL

Two separate fund-raising initiatives by Irish chapters have raised €90,000 for local charities.

The biggest is the hugely successful "Trash into Cash" appeal launched two years ago by mobile phone retailer Brendan Chambers – a member of Mayo Chapter for over eight years – who, after discovering he could get more than €10 each for old and damaged mobile phones, launched his challenge to local people to recycle their handsets for local charities.

His appeal raised over €30,000 in its first year and, after challenging all of BNI's Irish members to get involved last year, his company C&C Cellular staged a grand ball when cheques totalling over €80,000 were presented to charities throughout Ireland.

Now Brendan is extending the scheme to all BNI chapters in the UK. He said: "If any chapter can collect over a hundred phones, they can nominate their own charity. All they have to do is send me a box of phones which I will turn into money, sending them a cheque for the appropriate value to present to their nominated chapter charity. I aim to raise over 1 million by the end of this year." ●

Contact Brendan on 00353 87 2554048 or at: brendan.chambers@c&ccellular.com

WILL YOU BEAT IRISH CHAPTERS' €90,000 DONATION?

Meanwhile, members of Killarney Chapter have raised almost €10,000 for the Irish charity VITA, by staging a grand charity lunch attended by 75 business people from Kerry. Organiser Joanne O'Regan described it as a huge success and highlighted its secondary benefit of raising BNI's profile in the Kerry business community.

VITA (Latin for Life) provides emergency relief and rehabilitation programmes for displaced people and highly vulnerable communities in the Horn of Africa, building houses, helping people start up small farms, taking children for a holiday and running educational programmes. ●

GO AWAY! CAN'T YOU SEE I'M SLEEPING!?

By Tomas Ronan of Dublin's MarketWest Chapter

The call was innocent enough. "Hello. Can I book an appointment? I hurt my back, and a friend of mine told me about you." And that was when it all started to go wrong – or maybe, right. There I was, a happy-go-lucky therapist running a sports injury back pain clinic in Dublin, in my own time, on my own terms. No stress and definitely, no early morning starts.

"I think you should come along to our Chapter. It could be very good for your business" she said.

"I don't really have a business and, if I did, I wouldn't want to get involved in anything structured or formal," I replied. But, Trish Kerr was persuasive, she was a client, and I was talked into attending BNI's CityWest Chapter at the ungodly hour of 7 o'clock one fateful Wednesday morning. Strange, since I'd made it a firm rule to always be asleep at that time of day.

They were also very persuasive, and seemed a genuine lot. Against all my principles, I joined their group, and four years later, I'm still a member of the (renamed) Marketwest Chapter. In that time, things have changed, hugely, and I have been forced to change, dramatically. I told them: "I'm just a therapist." They said: "You have a business." "No I don't." But they insisted: "Yes you do – and we'll show you how to run it better and more profitably." That's when everything changed. "You need branding," said my new best friend, chapter colleague Ger Tannam. "Isn't that what they do to cows in the Wild West?" I asked. "No, it's what your business needs," he said, and his company, then introduced mine to its first ever branding. The effects were surprisingly good.

"What's your vision?" enquired another Ger. "My what?" "Your vision. Don't you have some idea about how you want your business to grow?" asked Ger Cummins.

"What do you want in business and in life?" "Don't know, I've never thought about it," I admitted. That also changed pretty quickly. Ger's life and business coaching business saw to that. I knew I should have said no at the start. But how do you say no, when everyone is so positive and keen to help?

Too late, I was committed and, anyway, reality was slowly dawning on me as my colleagues kept giving me new business ideas and opportunities. One of my biggest discoveries was that many business people are too busy to look after themselves. I could help by teaching them how to relax, because that's their biggest challenge. Stress is the biggest killer and accelerator of illness in the western world. More clients came my way, finding that the more relaxed and revitalised they became, the quicker their work was done and the healthier they became – better equipped and living longer, to enjoy all the money they made.

Suddenly I had to take my business seriously, and consider expanding into related fields. After a lot of searching, we came across a company in the States selling heat products like massage beds, healing pads, sports wraps and even heated office chairs. They were good and worked really well, so we started investing and offered our clients the extra benefits, which everyone seemed to like.

Duly enthused, we went to the Florida company that makes the beds and bought a few for the Clinic. They said we should become their agents. "Well, OK. Why not?" we said. Then we discovered they'd made us agents for the whole of Europe. Back in Dublin, other chapter colleagues told me: "You should be using BNI's worldwide network to spread the word, because we know your products and techniques work. Your business should be global."

MEET MARY – IRELAND'S FIR

Mary Eastwood may be one of the smallest members of BNI's Irish community – she's all of 5ft nothing! – but she's very big in terms of commitment, referral giving and gaining business since she joined Dublin's Airport Chapter three years ago.

When she's not out hunting for business for fellow Chapter members – 178 last year made her the top referral giver in Ireland's North-East region and placed her top of the 'Show Me the Money' league table – she runs Albrite Training, specialising in computer and soft skills training courses.

Within a year of joining BNI, she was on her Chapter's leadership team and then took over as Chapter Director before her

commitment and outstanding referral record marked her out as an ideal candidate to join the ranks of BNI's regional management, becoming the first female Assistant Director in Ireland towards the end of last year.

As you'd expect, Mary combines her dual director and chapter roles with renewed energy, and is determined to make the next 12 months her most successful yet. She is pictured being 'man-handled' by her male assistant director colleagues, watched by Executive Director Pat Guiden (far right) during a break at a recent directors' meeting in Dublin's Croke Park stadium. ●

Contact Mary on: +353 1 839 1210



HAVING A BALL: BNI members and directors enjoying themselves at the C&C Cellular Gala Ball.

DEN IN THE EMERALD ISLE...



Tomas Ronan at work

"Help," I shouted at my next chapter meeting. Ger Tannam said: "Relax, new branding is what you need." Ger Cummins said: "Now, it's time to change your goals." And Paul Lanigan said: "You need a marketing plan," so his sales training consultancy showed us how. Other members stepped in. Sharon Triggles introduced me to great graphic design, Gordon Murphy made us a promotional DVD, Tony Clarke taught us some important business facts of life, printer Gerry Cullen said we should have some business cards, and of course we then needed the help of financial adviser Conor Swan to fund it all!

The list goes on and on but, thanks to the skills of all my chapter colleagues and their contacts, I finally have a BUSINESS, equipped with the tools and all the expert help I need. Four years ago I never dreamt of anything like this. It's quite something.

So thank you BNI, and 'sorry' if I seemed reluctant in the early days. But, now that you've made a businessman out of me, I'm bound to ask: If you know of anyone in Europe interested in using our great products or who might like to work with us as an agency, please contact me. After all, I'm only doing what you have taught me to do.... •

Contact Tomas on +353 1 514 3022

ST (BNI) LADY!



Photo courtesy of Grainne Duggan, Art and Soul Photographers – former chapter director and member of the Airport Chapter.

Members of Cork City Chapter reckon they'll have an extra reason for celebrating their 10th anniversary later this month – having generated €1,000,000-worth of business during the six month tenure of the group's retiring leadership team!

When Chapter Director Des Murphy, Membership-Co-ordinator Sean Ware and Secretary/Treasurer Ron Casey took over, they made two demands on members - pass more referrals and generate more business. So they set a huge challenge: produce €1M of business in the next six months!

Des said: "During our training, we learnt how to record the value of referrals – once they have been converted to business – using 'thank you' slips, so we introduced these and set the bar high at €1M in terms of the business we wanted to achieve by the time we came to stand down.

"After just three months we were delighted to announce that members were well on their way, having produced €730,000 of business and I think we'll hit the 1M-mark, maybe with a week to spare!" As SuccessNet went to press, members of Cork City (pictured right) had passed referrals totalling just over €900,000 and remained confident of meeting their target. •

Contact Des Murphy on +353 21 427 5347

CORK CITY ON WAY TO AMBITIOUS €1M TARGET



BNI SMOOTHES PATH FOR BIG WEBSITE MERGER

She claims they still work out of a cowshed in Ireland's least known county but, whatever her company's rustic charms, Maggie Bowen is now the boss of one of the country's largest and fastest growing web development businesses following a merger that stemmed from a BNI referral.

A member of Cill Dara Chapter in Naas, County Kildare, Maggie (pictured right) had been looking at joint ventures with other e-business specialists and developers as a way of expanding her own company, SitesToGo, in Clonbullogue, Co. Offaly, when her Chapter Director Finbar Malone passed a referral inviting her to hold exploratory talks with his cousin, Vincent, head of well-respected rival e-commerce company, InternetLAB in Maynooth.

After discussions spanning several weeks, the two firms agreed to integrate their businesses, making the new venture one of Ireland's most high-profile e-business providers, with over 600 clients ranging from SMEs to international companies, spread across Ireland, the UK and mainland Europe.

Less than six months later, Maggie says this single referral has already generated an extra €35,000 worth of business for her team, and an immeasurable volume of new business for colleagues in her own and neighbouring chapters to whom she regularly passes referrals for a wide range of services.

She said: "Because the e-business market is so crowded and we have so many competitors, our new market share of around 1% may not sound very significant, but in fact we've become one of the major players in Ireland. When Finbar gave me the referral I had no idea it would escalate our own development so quickly, but the fusion of our businesses has suited us both."

To ensure the integration ran efficiently, Maggie turned to her BNI colleagues to provide many of the services needed. "Around 90% of the work was referred to members in my chapter who provided everything from business planning, mortgage, legal and accountancy advice, to PR, printing and photography. I even got a fellow member to witness the signature which sealed the deal," she said.

Despite her business growth, Maggie has no intention of reducing her BNI involvement – in fact, just the opposite, having recently become an assistant director. "For me, BNI's incredible network is just as valuable as its business referral system so, while we get significant business from referrals, we'll be looking to expand by creating more BNI partnerships in Ireland and abroad." •

Maggie can be contacted on +353 46 973 0147. For more information about her business, visit www.sitetogo.biz.



'Inspirational' Hastings back from dead to deliver 10,000 referrals

Five years ago, the Hastings Chapter was on its knees. The once-buoyant South Coast group had declined to just a handful of members, and it was even suggested it might be time to call it a day.

Fast forward to the present day and the contrast could not be more dramatic. Today, Hastings is riding on the crest of the wave, and with over 40 members it is now one of the largest groups in the country, while the level of business it conducts has soared as members

(pictured above) raced past their first 10,000 referrals milestone at the end of last year.

BNI Executive Director, Andrew Hall said: "It was a tough time for everyone involved in the group, especially the founding members whose loyalty and commitment has since laid the foundation for what has followed. Departing members told us that with half of the chapter's catchment in the sea, we would never be big, and that everyone who might be interested in joining the group had been

asked. They said nothing more could be done."

But it could, and it was, and Andrew has no doubt where the credit lies. "The key has been a succession of world-class team leaders in the revitalised chapter, each building on the work of those they replaced, and the result is a buoyant Hastings Chapter that will remain at the top for years to come."

He added: "No organisation likes to acknowledge failure, however small in relative terms, but the fact is that Hastings was down and out just a few years ago, and has now risen from the dead to become one of BNI's best chapters." ●

THE RIGHT CHEMISTRY GETS PROPERTY SALES MOVING

Tim Gordon is an experienced Sussex estate agent. But until last autumn, it wasn't really working for him as a member of the rejuvenated Hastings Chapter – not least because he'd been unable to establish a rapport with the group's then mortgage broker.

Then a few weeks before Christmas, the broker's membership came up for renewal and he decided to leave BNI. But his 'loss' instantly became gains for both Tim and the Chapter when the vacant position was seized by a delighted Simon Rushbroke from Top Mortgage Solutions, whose arrival has heralded a remarkable change in the 'power circle' relationship between estate agent and mortgage specialist.

Tim, who runs Homebuyer.co.uk, said: "You'd have thought that any estate agent and mortgage adviser in the same chapter would do great business together, but for a variety of reasons it just didn't happen

between me and Simon's predecessor. But as soon as Simon arrived, I knew he was the sort of specialist to whom I could refer a lot of business."

The result is that in less than four months, Tim has passed around 130 solid referrals to Simon, all involving home buyers needing mortgages while in turn, Simon has been able to give Tim a small but steady flow of referrals from clients with properties that have proved difficult to sell – an area of expertise for Tim's firm.

Tim added: "In BNI, whatever your business, the bottom line is that you have to be able to trust and rely on all of your chapter colleagues and that was not something I could easily do with Simon's predecessor. However, Simon does not get all this business from me simply because it's convenient to use him. He gets my referrals because I trust him and he has proved himself to be very good at what he does.

Simon commented: "Last November I



received a call from my accountant George Coleman – a member of the chapter – telling me that a vacancy had arisen and would I be interested. I knew of Tim's estate agency long before I went along to my first meeting as a visitor but I just happened to sit next to him and our business relationship took off from there. After little more than three months, I know that BNI membership will be worth a minimum of £25,000 in my first year." Tim is pictured above (left) with Simon ●

Contact Tim on 07044 002003 and Simon on 01424 730350.

Liz loved it so much she started a company!

When Liz Jeffries joined the Hastings Chapter last June, she was working for a company dedicated to getting long-term unemployed people back to work. But, after just a few weeks watching the chapter's entrepreneurs working together, she knew she had to have a business of her own.

The result is Bright Home Moving Solutions, a consultancy that takes the stress out of finding, buying or renting a new home and just six months later, Liz says it's the best move she's ever made.

"I'd never have had the courage to start my own company without the inspiration of my BNI colleagues," she said. "They helped me every step of the way and I used the services of eight members to help me get the business off the ground."

Among those involved were graphic designer Andy Willard who produced her corporate identity, Andy Ferguson from Natwest Bank who set up banking facilities, Gemma Proctor who constructed the website, Vic Giles who produced her stationery, Rhett Thompson

who did her vehicle signwriting, business coach Jennifer Beaumont-Whyte who taught Liz how to survive in business, IT specialist Peter Care who looked after her computing needs, and Kate Packer who provides Lisa's call-answering services.

Such is Hastings Chapter's growing reputation as a business force in the town that Liz's former company obviously realised the value of BNI membership – promptly placing another employee in the chapter to fill her old category." ●

Contact Liz on 07702 265453

IT'S LUNCHTIME SO IT MUST BE BNI!!

It's finally happened. BNI has its first UK lunchtime chapters and, after barely three months in business, Norwich's aptly-named Innovation Chapter and Parkside Chapter in Derby are both doing very nicely, thank you!

Although one in five chapters in North America was formed as lunchtime groups, BNI's rapid growth throughout the UK and Ireland has been achieved entirely with chapters meeting for breakfast - none of which will change their traditional early morning start.

National Director Gillian Lawson commented: "While we welcome our first lunchtime chapters, there are no plans to alter BNI's meeting philosophy which has proved hugely successful worldwide. But we acknowledge there is a demand in some communities for complementary lunchtime groups and occasionally, where there are compelling reasons to do so, we will consider local factors and decide each case individually."

Innovation's first Chapter Director, estate agent Steve Pimm said: "We wanted to start a new chapter in Norwich so much, but for some of the core group members with existing early morning commitments, that would have been impossible unless we'd been allowed to meet at lunchtime."

He added: "I suppose the pressure is now on us to achieve early success, if only to prove we're not prejudicing the tried and tested breakfast formula. It's early days, but I'm confident we will soon establish ourselves in Norwich's business community and strengthen BNI's growing reputation by complementing the city's three successful breakfast chapters."

East Anglia Executive Director James Cruickshank acknowledged that opinion was divided over the need for lunchtime chapters but added: "The fact is we are receiving a

growing number of requests from business people in Norwich, Ipswich and Cambridge to start lunchtime groups. If Innovation becomes a proven success I suspect similar lunchtime chapters may follow, but there will be no headlong rush towards this."

Also standing out among other new groups is Deise Chapter in the small County Waterford town of Dungarvan where, despite having a population of barely 6,000 from which to attract members, the chapter was developed and launched in just seven weeks! Chapter Director, John Creedon said: "When we first came together, people thought we'd never gain enough support from our small business community, so you can imagine how proud we were to be told, just weeks after launch, that our rural group had topped the region's chapter rankings."

Meanwhile, other recent UK and Irish chapter launches include Anna Livia Chapter



(Dublin), Darwin (Beckenham), Diamond (Dublin), Fisherraw (Mussleburgh), Foundation (Birmingham), Gateways (Cork), Hertsleigh (Brombourne), Liffey (Naas, Co. Galway), Magnum Opus (Eltham), New York (York), Saltway (Droitwich), Spinnaker (Portsmouth), Staines (Surrey), Thames (Kew Green, Richmond-upon-Thames), Union (Berkhamstead) and Wildfire (Ripon). New chapters recently launched in The Netherlands include: Bartje (Assen), Chopin (Arnhem), De Giraf (Emmen), De Valken (Den Haag), Traianus (Nijmegen) and Uiver (Rotterdam). ●



WHAT TIME DO YOU CALL THIS? Members of the new lunchtime Innovation Chapter get a time-check in the sunshine.

Brunel members rescue 'Fawltly Towers' couple

BNI members have come to the rescue after the new owners of a Torquay Hotel discovered their business acquisition had developed rather more problems and faults than they'd bargained for!

Having just purchased the Kingston House Hotel, Jo Horton & Will Moody decided to take a short winter break, little realising that when they returned, they'd be met with burst pipes, floods, dodgy drains and suspect electrics - to mention just a few of the disasters in store.

Luckily the couple struck one bit of crucial luck when, amongst the first people they contacted on their return was Brunel Chapter member Paul Hall of Colour Works Print & Design (they also needed new marketing and promotional materials!) who soon realised Jo and Will required the services of a lot more tradespeople to sort out their hotel's 'Fawltly Towers' dilemmas.

While dealing with their print needs, Paul introduced the couple to some of his BNI

colleagues, including electrician Andy Spalding of AC Electrifix Ltd, builder Richard Skitch from RSBC and Rob Pethick of SRP Chartered Accountants, who soon had all the problems under control.

With all of their teething problems resolved, Jo and Will are now happily enjoying a successfully growing business, but Jo acknowledged: "We were fortunate to be introduced to the services of various BNI members who were all very helpful, friendly and professional, going out of their way to help us out of sticky situations."

"It was only after buying the hotel that we realised it needed rather more work than we'd thought. When we first contacted Paul we knew nothing about BNI and had no idea how useful all his colleagues would turn out to be, but if ever we need anything in the future, we will turn to BNI first!"

After fixing the hotel's electrical shortcomings, Andy Spalding (Brunel's current

chapter director) commented: "We're an enterprising and vibrant group and when we heard about the couple's problems, it became a collective challenge to put everything right as quickly as possible. Hopefully they'll now be recommending our services to all of their guests and suppliers." ●

Contact Andy on 07799 264299



SMILING AGAIN: Torquay hoteliers Jo and Will are happy again, now that Brunel Chapter members have solved all their teething troubles.



train&gain

Three steps to heaven? Well, almost...

By Stephen Dobson, Chapter Director of Royal Armouries Thursday Chapter, Leeds

Nobody likes to admit failure. But when something has gone wrong, the key is to recognise the mistakes that have been made and take steps to put things right. In Leeds, we're doing just that – and the results are looking good....

Two years ago, the Thursday Morning Chapter at The Royal Armouries Museum in Leeds was a vibrant and successful group with a strong membership but, over a six-month period last year we lost 40% of our members, some of them because they felt they weren't getting enough business from the chapter.

When the new leadership team took over last autumn, we realised we had to act quickly to restore the group's former dynamism so, after reaffirming the goals and aspirations of our remaining members, we launched three simple new initiatives to increase morale, grow the membership - and subsequently boost the business being generated within the chapter.

Step 1:

An obvious priority was to increase the size of the group, so as chapter director I created an incentive for members to bring along more visitors. Now, each time someone's visitor becomes a member, (s)he is automatically entered into a prize draw that will see the winner jet off for a fortnight's holiday in Florida, staying in a superb villa with its own pool.

Naturally, the more new members anyone introduces, the more tickets (s)he has in the draw, which will take place on my final day in the chair. We've added five excellent new

members in a two-month period, and we're on course to double this by time the leadership team stands down.

Step 2:

With little more than £50,000 worth of business having been generated between our (then) 16 members in the previous quarter, another immediate goal was to increase the quality and quantity of referrals. Our Secretary Treasurer, Justine Osmotherley from Shulmans Solicitors came up with the idea of launching a £1m New Business Target, which the whole chapter embraced and is now working towards by the end of this year.

Justine's husband - a graphic designer - created an eye-catching £1m Business Appeal Tracker Board and, in the following five weeks, our members generated almost £100,000 of new business. Now, everyone looks forward to updating the target board at each meeting to show our progress.

Step 3:

More members and more business aside, we knew we had to recreate the enthusiasm for which our Thursday Chapter was once renowned, and to help achieve this our Membership Co-ordinator Colin Mackinder came up with the idea to encourage everyone to improve the quality of their 60-second presentations, by awarding "The BOSS Award" to the best speaker each week.



LEADERS OF THE PACK: Senior members of the Thursday Chapter have good reason to be smiling.

The member who delivers the very Best Of Sixty Seconds, now wins what has become the much sought after BOSS Trophy, and (s)he holds onto this for as long as they continue to be voted the best presenter – but competition is now tough, with all members wanting the kudos of displaying the mini Oscar statuette in front of them on the breakfast table. The trophy has resulted in fantastic, lively, humorous presentations week-in and week-out – and once again our chapter meetings are vibrant, enjoyable sessions.

We know there are many great BNI chapters, but with our creative approach and rekindled passion, we are determined the Royal Armouries Thursday Chapter will once more be a Leader of the Pack! ●

Stephen Dobson runs Document XL, supplying photocopiers and other communications equipment to business. He can be contacted on 08456 448 600 or 07971 000561.

Who's Who among your visitors – and does it really matter?

By Sandra Hart, Executive Director for South & West Ireland

In the 'positive contribution' section of every meeting agenda, members are invited to say: I have this referral, I have a great testimonial and, importantly, I have brought a visitor today. We don't ask you to qualify your visitors' presence by saying: "I have an eligible visitor today who wants to submit an application and I think the Membership Committee will like him/her...". All we ask is that you bring visitors.

However, when we ourselves think about visitors, we do often pre-qualify them in terms of whether or not they'd be likely to join our chapter. How often have you thought: "Oh, I won't invite Joe because he would never be able to get up in the morning every week" or "I won't invite Mary, since she doesn't have a business that would fit into our power circle."

In fact, whether or not your visitors want to join BNI is irrelevant, since no-one can automatically join even if they like what they've seen. Being accepted for membership is dependent on a number of factors so, if we can't invite visitors to join the chapter, what is our goal in inviting visitors?

Well let's look at the different types of visitors who attend chapters, the first group of whom I'm going to call tourists. What do tourists do? They visit a group, have a great time and spend some money. They often go home telling everyone what a fabulous event they've experienced, viewing members as solution providers, able to help solve other's problems. These visitors may well have contacts in the industry you want to break into, and their friend could even turn out to be that one person you've fruitlessly been asking your chapter colleagues time and again to find for you.

In fact, a tourist visitor might even become your best client. I know of a number of members who have received serious business from visitors who only came to a single breakfast meeting. For example, one chapter recently invited three priests as visitors and, while it's unlikely any will seek to join BNI, they have already become valuable contacts for the chapter's wedding 'power circle', and one has also sent a stream of visitors to the chapter with businesses to promote.

The second type of visitor is someone you will never personally see at your chapter – namely, the substitute you have sent when you can't be there yourself. But, while your 'sub' may be familiar to you, don't forget that (s)he is likely to be a new face to your chapter, and therefore a visitor in all but name – introducing your colleagues to new business opportunities.

The last type of visitor is someone whom you would like to recruit into your power circle. So if, for instance, you wanted a gardener in your group, how many would you have to invite in order for one to want to join your team? Obviously, it depends on many things, including how attractive your chapter is, its size, the number of referrals it



SANDRA HART: "All visitors are important"

passes and its energy. But, does it really matter whether it's the fourth gardener who joins, or the tenth? What surely makes a difference is having a stream of gardeners visiting the chapter, knowing the right one will eventually come along. The key is to keep inviting people you'd like to see in your group.

Finally, a couple of reminders: If you are planning to invite a visitor whose business category is similar to that of an existing member, always check with your colleague to make sure they are happy about it. Remember too, that the only people you do not invite as visitors, are members of other chapters. (If you want to meet them, the best place is at one of the many regional training workshops, joint chapter events or members' days held in your area).

Visitors ARE all important to every chapter. They change the dynamics of the 'audience', turning what might otherwise be just another dress rehearsal into an opening night, stimulating higher energy levels in open networking, better presentations, and more of a buzz in the meeting.

And, when you look at the different types of visitors, it really doesn't matter what sort you invite. What DOES matter is that you invite visitors, that they come along, and you are contributing to the "I have" part of the weekly agenda. You are giving, and your chapter is gaining. Conversely, if your chapter does not have visitors at each meeting then in reality, you are all leaving potential money on the table! •

Sandra can be contacted on:
+353 87 934 5686.

When Bristol business partners Ruth Moody and Helen Virgin started looking for networking organisations through which they could market their new training consultancy, they naturally wanted to use their professional 'people skills' to identify groups whose members might best complement their needs.

"It might sound rather clinical, but when you've launched a new venture on limited resources, it is only sensible to align yourself alongside business and trade professionals with whom you think you can develop the best working relationships," said Helen. "So we visited a number of business groups - including BNI chapters - before making our decisions."

That was nearly two years ago when, after checking out the 'opposition', the duo chose to join two Bristol-based BNI groups, the Hadlee and St. Swithins chapters, with whom both are now enjoying successful relationships – Helen in her capacity as current chapter director of St Swithins, and Ruth who is preparing to take over the chair of Hadlee at the next change of leadership team.

BRISTOL PAIR LOOKING TO GO FAR

"We are in the 'people business' so, even after deciding BNI was the best, we still looked carefully at the individuals in both chapters, assessing who each of us would feel most in harmony with as professional colleagues. Luckily, we chose different chapters – since we couldn't have joined the same one," Helen added.

Together, they run Farscape, a training consultancy geared to helping companies get the best out of employees and maximise business performance and, while they acknowledge they've not yet been inundated with referrals through BNI, they have gained hugely in terms of personal development, business skills and forging new business relationships.

Helen admitted: "It's probably our fault that we've not received many referrals because even after 18 months, colleagues still seem to regard us as corporate trainers, while we see ourselves more as general facilitators. Finding the right way to explain this to our fellow members, so that they will know how to identify more referrals, sounds like our key challenge for the coming year. Even so, BNI has still helped us win business – to the extent that we've just taken on our first member of staff, always a landmark for any young venture." •

Contact Helen or Ruth on 0117 370 1800

BIG BED CHALLENGE MAKES CARL SLEEP EASY

Carl Walsh was quite happy with the way his established bed retailing business was going. His showroom, The Divan Centre in Leeds' Eastgate, was well known and attracted a steady stream of domestic customers who nearly always came to buy just one new bed.

But his whole approach to business was changed dramatically after he was challenged at a regional networking presentation by BNI's Yorkshire Director Niri Patel who asked: 'Why are you seeking referrals from your chapter colleagues that lead to sales of just one bed at a time, when instead you could get referrals to sell hundreds!?'

As an enthusiastic long-term member of Leeds Network Central Chapter, Carl felt slightly aggrieved that his *modus operandi* had been questioned, so in no uncertain terms he replied that couldn't possibly handle that sort of business, even if it was offered to him. But Niri persisted and, after the meeting, suggested Carl should re-think his whole business strategy to boost profitability.

"To be honest, I'd never considered this approach, so I felt justified in saying I wasn't able to cater for big orders," said Carl. "But

Niri's assertive attitude got me thinking, and I started to work out what I would need to do to cope with far bigger orders. With new objectives, I spoke to my manufacturers and suppliers, started to source potential customers who would be likely to place big orders, and then obtained a licence permitting me to handle bulk disposals of mattresses."

Happy that he could now cope with bigger contracts, Carl (pictured right) turned back to his BNI colleagues and announced: "Today I'm looking for referrals that will lead to me selling 100 beds or mattresses at a time....." – and was promptly given a personal introduction to one of the UK's leading student accommodation supplies company, Liberty Living who needed a 'few' replacement mattresses.

A 'few' turned out to be more than 500 and, although Carl was required to enter an unknown bidding process (he'd never tendered for anything), with the help of fellow Network Central members, Rick Armstrong of Mentor Media and David Miller from Bartfields's accountants, he won the order to deliver the mattresses in Leeds

and dispose of the same volume of old bedding.

"I was then asked if we could supply anywhere in the UK and this time I immediately said 'yes!' – ending up with our delivering 1,700 more mattresses to student campuses in Leicester, Sheffield and Glasgow. This level of business represents fantastic growth and is not something I could have imagined a year ago. We've got further similar contracts under negotiation, so I'm very grateful to Niri for challenging me to think differently!" ●



Contact Carl on 0800 917 9687 or 0113 243 3616

POWER CIRCLES ARE SHAPE OF SUCCESS IN HOLBORN

Most BNI chapters have one or more 'power circles' (designed to increase the scale and number of referrals shared among related businesses) – but in central London's Holborn Chapter, they've taken it to the limit, with all 26 of their members in one of six such clusters.

"The result is that we're generating more referrals than ever before," said Sophia Simmonds, a financial planning consultant, who, as Holborn's Chapter Director has been a dynamic force in taking the group to the next level, under her 'triple quality plan' - quality members, quality referrals and promotion of the chapter as a quality business opportunity.

Creative Designer Hon Lam, of Bull Rodger describes his creative power circle as a serious media agency, incorporating his own design

service agency, printer, website designer and specialist photographer. He said: "I might have a client who needs a branding job, requiring a range of deliverables such as photography, a website and a set of printed literature. Working as part of the power circle is like my having several specialist departments under one roof, enabling me to offer clients an all encompassing service."

Regularity and focus of meetings is also important, says Tim Farish, a Pitch and Presentation specialist who leads Holborn's commercial power circle comprising a solicitor, accountant, Trademark attorney and PR & marketing agency. "We meet monthly after work in a wonderfully atmospheric pub that ensures meetings are informal. Each member gets a 15-minute slot, starting with a description

of a recent project (s)he has worked on, and the group focuses on creating referrals for that person.

"This develops a deeper understanding of what everyone does, making it much easier to refer each other. We also get fresh perspectives on each other's businesses, allowing us to spot opportunities that might not previously have been obvious. There is real excitement that we could transform the amount of business we create for each other," he added.

Last month, the same philosophy produced superb results when Holborn celebrated 10 years of referral giving with a champagne breakfast attended by 100 guests. Chapter Director Sophia added: "We use power circles to drive our group business forward and it was through the same close-knit teamwork that we attracted such a large number of visitors – all of them potential new members." ●

Contact Membership Co-ordinator, Deborah Simmonds on 020 8673 1195

Two BNI members are enjoying new business recognition after both being voted "The Best of..." in their respective towns, Bedford and Norwich.

Life coach Lynn Serafinn is the first winner of a new monthly award aimed at finding Bedford's most popular businesses, launched by Trevor Nicholls who runs the www.thebestofBedford.co.uk - part of a network of websites that champion local businesses.

Both he and Lynn (pictured far right) are



THEY'RE THE BEST OF Bedford – and Norwich!

members of the town's Enterprise Chapter but, if that sounds like a cosy co-incidence, Trevor stressed: "Hundreds of townspeople log onto our website and vote for the businesses they think merit an award. Lynn's year-old venture, Create-A-Life, received over 40% of the votes to easily win the 'Best Health and Beauty Business' title – our first award."

Meanwhile over in Norwich, it was the owner of the www.thebestof.co.uk/Norwich website, Chris Greenfield (pictured left receiving his trophy from Chapter Director Caroline Martin) who found himself in the limelight after being voted Member of the Year 2007 by his colleagues in the city's Castle Chapter. He beat 26 members and was chosen for his diligence and contribution to the group, first

as secretary/treasurer and then membership co-ordinator.

Current membership co-ordinator, Paul Barrs, who created Castle's Member of the Year award commented: "Whilst Chris usually has a handful of referrals each week, his passion for BNI is obvious. He is a regular at training workshops and social events, and often presents the liveliest 60-second slot." ●

Contact Lynn on 0845 880 2528 and contact Chris on 0800 458 2934



YOUR 10-MINUTE WONDERS

While your weekly 60-second infomercials are vital to keeping you and your business firmly in the minds of your chapter colleagues, it is your less frequent 10-minute presentations that can really help other members get to understand what you do – and learn precisely what referrals you want. So content, creativity and delivery are all important if you want your presentations to be memorable. Here we feature some recent enterprising efforts that have come to our attention....



Building bridges and business in Glenrothes

It's easy to demonstrate your expertise to chapter colleagues if, for example, you're a therapist, graphic designer or a florist. But, when you build lightweight bridges for a living, how on earth do you promote your product to other BNI members? Why – you build them a bridge, of course!

Which is exactly what Fife fibreglass product specialist Brian Johnson did during his 10-minute presentation to colleagues in Rothes Chapter – insisting they don warm coats and leave their cosy venue, to watch him put the finishing touches to his latest 20-foot long span – before testing its strength by all standing on it together!

While (as our picture above shows) the combined weight of the entire Chapter made no impact on Brian's sturdy bridge, his unusual presentation about his Glenrothes-based company, Genesis Composites Ltd, left a lasting impression on colleagues - who were even more surprised when, after the meeting, he and just one other member of his team lifted the entire lightweight structure onto a lorry in a matter of minutes, ready for the short trip back to his factory.

He said: "It's one thing trying to describe how strong a GRP (fibreglass) footbridge is, but much easier if you can get your whole Chapter to stand together on one. I'd warned members to bring warm clothes but hadn't explained why – so there were a few surprised faces when I took them outside. Initially they were a bit wary about all standing on the bridge but when I told them it would easily take the weight of cars, they began to relax." •

Contact Brian on 01592 743251 or visit: www.genesiscomposites.co.uk

A BIRTHDAY TO REMEMBER IN CORK

It was nowhere near the biggest event she'd ever staged, and certainly not the grandest, but when Niamh McCarthy of Capricco Event Management delivered her 10-minute presentation to the East Cork Chapter, she knew colleagues would talk about it for weeks to come.

In the middle of her presentation Niamh left the room while, to everyone's bemusement, two of her colleagues, Hannah Lordan and Alison Moriarty passed around party hats, balloons and streamers.

"None of use knew what was going on," said Chapter Director Aidan O'Brien. "But Niamh returned with a large candle-lit birthday cake, and presented it to our very shocked colleague, Owen Crosbie, who had told no-one it was his birthday so we proceeded to sing happy birthday to him, before letting Niamh to finish her slot. For pure interaction, it was one of the best presentations I've seen." •

Hey hoe, it's off to the ball they go...

// I say ladies, aren't you a little over-dressed for our breakfast meeting today?" enquired Heyhoe Chapter's director David Birkett as he surveyed the entrance of this glamorous sextet. "Not at all," came their response. "Just you wait and see...."

All was revealed half an hour later when Lizzie Bartlett stood up in the Clevedon, Somerset chapter to give her 10-minute presentation, thanking colleagues for helping raise the profile of Athena Gowns, her ball gown sales and hire business which has gone from strength to strength since she joined BNI a year ago.

She said: "I thought that asking my female Heyhoe colleagues to model some of the gowns during my presentation would add colour to our breakfast meeting and



set a few temperatures rising on a cold winter's morning."

David added: "It was a treat for tired eyes to have Heyhoe's ladies dressed in stunning ball gowns at seven in the morning and, amazingly, none of us chaps knew anything about it until we found the ladies had commandeered all the toilets just before the meeting. Then we knew something was up." •

Contact Lizzie Bartlett on 07737 344603.



As if her colourful and artistic creations were not enough to capture the attention of her chapter colleagues, County Waterford florist Martina Bannon had a unique surprise up her sleeve – or rather, hidden in one of her flowers – when she stood up to give her first 10-minute presentation.

Martina is a founder member of the new Deise Chapter in Dungarvan, and after sharing some of the creative secrets that have earned her Wild Orchid Florists business an enviable reputation in the town, she handed each

The Diamond & the Rose

member and visitor an orchid, encouraging them to handle their blooms very carefully.

Only at the end of the presentation did she explain the need for extra care – announcing that one of the orchids contained a real diamond, donated by fellow member, Alan Dalton who runs the town's jewellers of the same name. An enthusiastic 'hunt the diamond' scramble then followed, before video production specialist Michael O'Brien announced with a whoop of delight that he'd found the diamond in his orchid. To complete Michael's memorable morning, he also walked off with the meeting's door prize – a bouquet of roses presented by Martina. The couple are pictured (above left.) •

Contact Martina Bannon at Wild Orchid Florist on +353 87 657 0761.

Easy riders?

Scots set for epic 3,000 mile ride in their kilts!

BNI members across America, be warned: 'We're Scots, we're wearing crash helmets and kilts, and we're coming to your town very soon....!'

That's the message from Colin Read, a member of Mussleburgh's Fisherraw Chapter, to prepare his Yankee counterparts for some unusual sights this summer when he and Iain Whyte, BNI Executive Director for South & East Scotland, embark on an epic 3,230-mile coast-to-coast fund-raising trip – stopping off in towns along the way to help run major BNI networking events.

To ensure their 10-day road trip on Harley Davidson motor bikes across 12 states doesn't go unnoticed, the duo have pledged to wear kilts for the whole journey from Washington DC to BNI's world headquarters in Los Angeles, California, taking in deserts, mountains and the Grand Canyon!

Keen biking enthusiasts, Iain and Colin will join motor biking members from US chapters, and they hope to raise £200,000 for the Moebius Research Trust, a charity set up by Colin and his wife after their son was born with a rare congenital disorder.

Colin said: "Being Scots, we wanted to make the journey even tougher, so we'll be wearing traditional kilts throughout the trip, although maybe we'll pack some long johns



just in case our legs suffer too much exposure! Between now and then, we're both on strict diets and exercise programmes because physical and mental fitness will be the key factor in completing the trip. It's going to be harder for Iain who wants to shed six stones before we depart from Edinburgh in June." ●

Colin, pictured above (left) with Iain, would welcome sponsorship on 07802 837690 or you can email him at: CDRA9@aol.com

An Essex husband-and-wife creative design team is celebrating a double triumph after putting BNI's referrals formula to the test – and emerging with a prestigious award-winning local authority contract.

Jeremy Rose, a member of Stansted Airport Chapter, who with his wife Tricia runs [c]-lutions, a Saffron Walden design and corporate communications company, had decided to follow BNI advice to make his 60-second infomercials as clear and specific as possible, by asking colleagues to find him senior corporate communications and marketing director contacts in local councils.

Almost immediately, his focused approach paid dividends when fellow member Ian Hudson, from Copyzone Archiving, gave Jeremy a referral, introducing his company to Harlow District Council.

The result? C-lutions first won the Council's contract to transform the look of its community

Stansted designers follow BNI 'flight path' to success

magazine, 'The Harlow Times', distributed to 35,000 residents, and then created such a striking new publication that the Council entered it in the national Chartered Institute of Public Relations Pride Awards – where it has just beaten off tough competition to win the coveted Silver award for Best Newspaper/Magazine in the Eastern Region.

The award recognises excellence in public relations and communications and was presented to Creative Solutions and Harlow Council's corporate communication's team at a formal awards evening in Ipswich.

Jeremy said: "My chapter colleague Ian Hudson happened to know the council's Corporate Communications Director, and it was thanks to his efforts in cultivating the link between the Council and myself, that led to our being invited to redesign The Harlow Times and to receiving this great accolade. But ultimately, it comes down to the training given to members by BNI – that we must ask for what we want in precise terms when we give our 60-second presentations." ●

Contact Jeremy on 01799 541114 or at: jeremy@c-lutions.co.uk



SUBSTITUTE GETS THE VIP TREATMENT

When unavoidable absence from the BNI breakfast table means having to find a substitute, then it's important to ensure your replacement is not going to let you down.

Happily, Russell Treasure – a member of Olympus Chapter in Leyland near Preston – had no such doubts when he had to miss a recent meeting, after arranging for his substitute to be collected from home in a beautiful orange Lamborghini Gallardo sports car, and then be chauffeur driven to work afterwards!

In fact it was all in a day's work for Russell, whose business 'Lamborgenie.com' hires out prestige sports cars for celebrity events and special occasions. He said: "I'd asked a business

colleague, Martin Cooke from Ribble Insurances Ltd, to act as my substitute and of course he would have been very willing to oblige, even without the VIP treatment.

"But I thought that since he was making the effort to get up very early on my behalf, the least I could do was provide one of my eye-catching cars and have him chauffeur driven to and from the chapter meeting. I gather his arrival caused a minor stir among the other Olympus members."

Our photo shows Martin being greeted by Chapter Director Gary Baldwin outside Olympus's venue, Farington Lodge in Leyland. ●

Contact Martin on 07737 393485 and Russell on 01254 854414.

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