



SuccessNet

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EDUCATION *and* INFORMATION BULLETIN *for* BNI MEMBERS

WE CAN'T GO ON MEETING LIKE THIS!

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WE'RE 10 YEARS OLD. Members of Concord Chapter – the second oldest in the UK – in high spirits as they celebrated their first decade of big business together.

CONCORD MEMBERS DELIVER 18,000 REFERRALS FOR STARTERS!

From inducting its 44th member and presenting founder members with their 10-year service ribbons, to singing Happy Birthday to 'birthday boy' John Pentel, Concord Chapter's 10th anniversary just before Christmas was a uniquely poignant occasion – a mixture of nostalgic memories and excitement for the opportunities ahead.

BNI's oldest (bar one) UK chapter, based at Batchworth Golf Club, Rickmansworth

in north-west London, was celebrating the 10th anniversary of the organisation's arrival in Britain when, with perfect timing, its members passed the group's 18,000th referral – an incredible 13,000 of which have come in the chapter's last five years.

On a day of records, guests of honour, BNI's national directors Martin and Gillian Lawson, presented some remarkable statistics about Concord members'

performance during an amazing decade (which began when the group was launched on 11th December 1996), including:

- One founder member, IFA Steve Pursey, had spent the equivalent of 42 days and nights attending chapter meetings over the previous 10 years, delivering 500 different 60-second infomercials.
- In total, Concord members had listened to 12,500 one-minute presentations, and delivered 5,000 10-minute presentations – the latter amounting to nearly four continuous days and nights.
- The combined value of referrals to some of the chapter's longest-serving members had far exceeded £500,000.
- Concord members' attendances at business skills training workshops totalled over 600 in the last five years, demonstrating the chapter's commitment to maximising its business.

Regional Director Kathleen Waller commented: "It was a true privilege to be at Concord's 10th anniversary meeting. Aside from a huge birthday cake and passing its amazing 18,000th referral, the Chapter inducted three new members bringing its strength to 44 – and to round off a perfect meeting, our single visitor that morning was so enthused that he applied to join on the spot.

"The leadership team had already agreed to a target membership of 45, so it was fitting to receive an application for the 45th and final vacancy at the chapter's 10th anniversary breakfast."

National Director Martin Lawson said: "In a single decade, BNI has changed the way that much of the UK and Ireland does business, and by any measure that's a remarkable achievement. Over the next decade we expect most of mainland Europe to follow the same pattern. It seems strange that just 10 years ago almost no-one in Britain had even heard of BNI when today, some of our top business leaders acknowledge that BNI's Givers Gain philosophy plays an important part in the overall business mix. That tells you how far BNI has progressed here in just 10 years!" •

GOLD CLUB RECEIVES BIG INTAKE

BNI's prestigious Gold Club received one of its largest intakes of new members during the final quarter of last year, when no fewer than 17 black badges were presented by busy BNI directors.

The coveted badges, awarded to members who have personally introduced at least six new members to BNI, recognise consistent effort to build stronger chapters by bringing visitors to meetings on a regular basis.

Our newest Gold Club entrants are (their chapters appear in parentheses): Nathene Arnaoutis, (Ham & High Chapter, North London), Phil Base (Apollo, Birmingham), Samantha Blindell (Leeds North), Bill Briceland (Alpha, Glasgow), Nicola Bury (Waterfront, Belfast), Paul Bushell (White Rose, Harrogate), Julie Dodsworth, (Knavesmire, York), Jim Friedman, (Ham & High, North London), Adrian Harvey (Barnsley Tykes, Barnsley),

Paul Irvine (Premier Armouries, Leeds), Maurice Press (Harlequin, Richmond-upon-Thames), Sheila Ritchie (Echo Chapter, Aberdeen), John Robson (Evolution, Glasgow), Jacqui Saxon, (Royal Armouries, Leeds), Mike Smith (Invincible, Preston), Richard Thomson (TGI, Edinburgh) and Chris Jeffrey White from Ilkley More Chapter, Ilkley.

Our congratulations to each and every one of them. •

ARE YOU READY FOR A BIG, BIG BREAKFAST?

Are YOU ready to take part in the ultimate of big breakfasts? Well you'll need to be, because on Tuesday, 6th February more than 14,000 BNI members in the UK, Ireland and across mainland Europe will mark International Networking Week by staging the world's biggest ever collection of simultaneous breakfast meetings!

While there have been some pretty sizeable BNI gatherings in recent years, none will come close to matching next month's huge celebration of word-of-mouth networking when each of the regions in every European country with a BNI presence, will host joint business breakfasts for ALL of the members within their respective regions.

In the UK and Ireland alone, several of the 39 regional events are expected to

bring together more than 500 members, but the single largest breakfast is destined to take place at Harrow Leisure Centre where 750 members and their visitors from North-West London's 26 chapters are joining forces.

The Big Breakfast represents one of the year's best opportunities for all members to participate in extended networking sessions, exploring new business activities with like-minded colleagues from different chapters whom they would not otherwise meet.

By the time you are reading this, arrangements for your own regional breakfast will be well in hand - and information should already be circulating in your chapter - but if you are not aware of your local Big Breakfast plans, ask your leadership team to announce the details now! Bear in mind that your regional Big

Breakfast will replace your own chapter's meeting in that week (irrespective of the day your chapter meets), so every member is expected to attend - or send a substitute - just as you would for your own chapter meeting.

Although the character of each region's big breakfast will vary with local factors, all of them will follow the traditional BNI weekly meeting agenda, complemented by a range of additional activities including some or all of the following:

- Business generation exercises to provide lucky member(s) with their 'dream referral'.
- A 10-minute keynote presentation from BNI's Founder Dr Ivan Misner.
- Dynamic 60-second presentations from some of your region's most hard-working members.
- Awards presented to top-performing members.
- Members' trade stands and business displays (in venues where space permits).

UK National Director Gillian Lawson said: "Other business networking organisations will be hosting their own events during International Networking Week, but I doubt any will be on the scale that we achieve with many of our individual regional events. We will also be inviting representatives from the wider business community, members of other networking organisations and interested parties from local and national government." •

SuccessNet will be featuring the best of BNI's Big Breakfast activities in its Spring edition but you can check out the Week's other events by visiting www.internationalnetworkingweek.co.uk



BNI Founder sails into Southampton for Conference

BNI Founder and Chairman Dr Ivan Misner will be the guest of honour and one of the keynote speakers at this year's European Conference Members' Day.

Southampton's five-star De Vere Grand Hotel on the city's waterfront is the impressive conference venue, and the

Members' Day - on Friday, 27th April - is expected to attract hundreds of delegates from all over the UK, Ireland and several mainland Europe countries.

As SuccessNet went to press, final details for an action-packed Members' Day were still being finalised, but the occasion will include

FOUNDER'S FLYING VISIT: BNI Founder and Chairman Dr Ivan Misner will address the European Conference's Members' Day in April.

high-octane delegates' networking sessions for members to make new contacts and identify potential business, as well as workshops on marketing, presentational and networking techniques, and further keynote addresses by some of BNI's most experienced directors.

National Director Martin Lawson said: "With the quality of our annual conference surpassing itself year upon year and BNI's Europe-wide membership growing larger all the time, the Southampton event is going to be very popular. While we always encourage members to book their places early, anyone who wants to benefit from what will be a dynamic business forum this April will need to reserve his or her place very soon to avoid disappointment."

Full Members' Day information, including details of specially discounted delegates' rates for chapter bookings of 10 or more members, can be found by visiting BNI's website at: www.bni.eu •

LAWSON'S LORE

When BNI arrived in Britain 10 years ago – and for the first few years of our rapid growth across the UK and Ireland – we were naturally keen to keep members' efforts focused on their individual chapters. It was important to lay the foundations of strong, successful groups whose members worked hard for each other's businesses before looking at possible opportunities beyond their own chapter boundaries.

However, with our continued development of worldwide networking facilities, we encourage members to take advantage of BNI's global reach. In simple terms this means that if you want a product or service which your own chapter's membership cannot provide – or you're looking to refer a piece of business but don't have the relevant expertise in your group – then a visit to the Network Central or Chapter Finder sections of BNI's website (www.bni.eu) will usually locate a BNI colleague who'll be delighted to help. Alternatively, ask your BNI director to tap into his or her own member network to find you the right person or service.

The same philosophy applies to BNI's ever-larger regional, national and international networking events whose purpose is to complement rather than distract from the ongoing weekly commitment you have to your chapter colleagues. Even the most successful chapter of 35 or 40 members, cannot possibly boast the collective expertise to meet every business challenge – but fortuitously, BNI does provide members with plenty of opportunities to network on an altogether larger scale.

Next month, for example, on a single day every BNI region in the UK, Ireland and Europe will host its own 'big breakfast' (see page 3) to mark International Networking Week, when hundreds of BNI members will come together to develop contacts and explore new business openings. The purpose of this event is to raise the profile of networking in the wider community, recognising it as an essential tool for success in today's business climate. But BNI members already know the value of expanding their networking links beyond their own chapters, so our 'Big Breakfasts' are as much about creating additional marketing opportunities for them as they are about celebrating BNI's achievements as the world's largest and most successful business networking organisation.

The message is clear and simple: Stay focused on helping your chapter colleagues – but don't ignore the many bigger and broader opportunities that BNI offers you.

We wish you a happy and prosperous year ahead! •

Mark Egan



THANK YOU EVERYONE: Lettings specialist Hannah McCartan being swept off her feet (literally) by chapter colleagues who provided all the help needed to launch her first business venture.

HANNAH'S 'HIGH STREET' IN A BNI CHAPTER

When the Swansea lettings agency for whom she worked was put up for sale, 25-year old Hannah McCartan knew the moment had come to decide if she had what it takes to run her own business.

Already a member of the city's Waterfront Chapter where she'd represented her employer for two years, Hannah was undaunted when she failed to raise the finance to acquire the agency, knowing she still had one great advantage over most would-be entrepreneurs. "I realised that everything I'd need to launch my own venture – Swansea's first web-based lettings agency – was readily at hand through my BNI colleagues and, even better, they were all tried, tested and available in the same place," she said.

"But while experience had shown me that BNI could do wonders for my new company, I never realised what a huge bonus it would be to have direct access to a one-stop shop for all my business needs – so much so that, if it wasn't for the other members of Waterfront Chapter, I simply wouldn't be here today," Hannah added.

"I'd come to Swansea to do my photography degree but after qualifying found photography just didn't pay enough, so I went into the property business and was initially disappointed when I was unable to acquire the agency. That's when I enquired how you go about setting up in business, speaking first to Waterfront's serial entrepreneur who told me that being your own boss was the only way forward in life. Other chapter members

had given me the same advice, making me quite jealous since they were the same age and had their own companies!!"

Last June, Hannah quit her job to go it alone. "That's when I discovered my chapter was a virtual High Street containing everything I needed," she said. "My first port of call was its business mentor who helped with my business plan. Then I had one-to-one's with the bank manager, accountant and business finance solutions expert. The web designer not only designed a great site for me but put me in touch with Swansea Institute who gave me some funding. My next stop was the chapter's corporate image designer, then the printer, solicitor, insurance broker and finally the IT consultant for my all-essential laptop and programs."

Hannah started trading last September and then discovered BNI's other secret. "I found Givers Gain wasn't just about business referrals. It was the support and encouragement I received from chapter colleagues that really spurred me on. The whole process of starting my own company was a lot less daunting thanks to all the advice on hand. Looking back, I don't think I'd have got things off the ground if I'd had to go out and find all the services I needed. Having a network of colleagues who knew me and understood the way I do business, gave me the necessary drive and confidence. We've built a strong community within our chapter and work so well as a team." •

Contact Hannah at McCartan Lettings & Property Management on 0845 300 6668.

A Baker's Dozen in UK – and another abroad!

The past three months has seen another flurry of chapter launches both at home and abroad, with a 'baker's dozen' of new chapters opening in the UK, and a similar number springing into action in Germany, The Netherlands and Switzerland.

The 13 new UK groups (which bring the total number of UK and Irish chapters to nearly 550) are:

Athena (Nelson, Lancashire), Bramhope High Flyers (Bramhope, West Yorkshire),

IAN WINS CHAPTER 'BABY RACE'

Two proud first-time fathers in South Birmingham's Olympic Chapter found themselves on the weekly meeting agenda for several weeks running, as their BNI colleagues had a flutter on who would join the ranks of parenthood first.

The wives of website directory owner Ian Prowse and his accountant Chris Wright, were both due to deliver their first babies on the same day – prompting a weekly guessing game in the Rubery-based chapter as members ran an informal 'book' on the likely winner. In the end it wasn't quite the expected photo finish, with Ian's wife Louise giving birth to their son Daniel nearly 48 hours before Chris's wife Sally delivered her baby daughter, Jessica.

Ian, who runs the 'Best of Bromsgrove' website commented: "Both Chris and myself were in at the launch of the Olympic Chapter nearly nine months ago and it wasn't long before I found out his wife and mine had been given the same expected delivery dates.



Since then Chris has become my accountant and a good friend, so there was friendly rivalry as to who would become a father first."

Like Ian, Chris has found BNI to be a boon for his new business, Crompton

Ward & Co. "I'd visited a couple of chapters as a substitute for the accountancy practice I used to work for and knew how good it was, so when I heard a new BNI chapter was being launched in the area soon after I'd started my own business, I got in very quickly - and I haven't been disappointed. It has been great for my new practice and introduced me to a lot of new clients – including Ian," he said.

Ian, pictured (above left) with Chris, added: "After only six months BNI has made a big difference to my business. I hope that in 20 years from now, Daniel and Jessica might meet up across a BNI breakfast table." •

Contact Ian on 01527 450836 and Chris on 01527 874170.

LOVE AND BUSINESS BLOSSOM ON THE TYNE

"I came for business, and bagged myself a man..."

That's how 25-year old Lisa Etherington summed up her unexpected bonus of BNI membership as she announced her engagement to chapter colleague Richard Kilner a few weeks ago.

The couple met two years ago when Richard joined Newcastle-upon-Tyne's Surtees Chapter and, in his own words, "took a real fancy" to Lisa, who had become a BNI member just weeks earlier.

"For a few weeks I watched Lisa delivering her presentations and thought what a nice person she was - very caring and professional. She looked pretty good too," said Richard, an insurance broker with Townergate Risk Solutions.

"I wanted to ask her out and when I learnt about BNI's one-to-one networking sessions, it gave me the opportunity to meet Lisa away from the formality of the weekly meeting. We talked about our businesses and then I finished our session by inviting her for a drink and was delighted when she agreed," Richard added.

Lisa recalled: "He flirted with me throughout the one-to-one, but he's a good-looking guy so I couldn't refuse. Our first date was great and it just went from there."

For several months the couple (pictured below) maintained a cool detachment at chapter meetings, but after a year together, other Surtees members began to realise their relationship extended beyond the weekly breakfast.



On their first 'anniversary', Richard sent Lisa the same cryptic text message he'd sent as he first waited for her in a Tyneside bar 12 months earlier. "I knew exactly where he'd be, so I got down there as fast as I could," she said. "He walked me across the Millennium Bridge and over a romantic dinner looking out over the river, he got down on one knee and proposed. It was perfect."

They announced their engagement to rousing applause from colleagues at the following week's chapter meeting, and have set the date for their wedding at nearby Bishop Auckland Castle this autumn. Lisa added: "I know BNI is about business, but you can't really top a referral that's given you a future husband, can you!?" •

Contact Lisa on 0191 350 6000 and Richard on 0191 229 2516.

FLYING HIGH WITH BNI

FLYING TONIGHT: Members of two Northants chapters prepare to go night-time networking – while 'flying' several feet off the ground.

Northamptonshire members have taken inter-chapter networking to new heights – sharing their business aspirations while 'bodyflying' several feet off the ground!

Twenty members of the Collingtree and Sixfields chapters recently teamed up for a breathtaking evening at the world's largest skydiving wind tunnel near Bedford – home to the new sport of 'Bodyflying' which simulates the freefall skydiving experience while participants hover just above the ground.

Collingtree's Garth Halestrap who runs a hygiene supplies company said: "Skydivers use the wind tunnel as a training aid, because the vertical stream of air supports their bodyweight, allowing them to navigate the air at any angle or fashion, improving their flying techniques. But you don't need any experience, so we turned it into a novel venue for a networking and social evening."

Following a short classroom session,

intrepid BNI members donned jump suits, helmet and goggles before moving into the air lock and being told to literally fall forward onto the floor. Garth added: "This took some guts, but you were immediately picked up by the air current and carried slowly across the chamber, face down several feet from the ground. We were flying for the first time in our lives and it was the most incredible feeling."

The event was organised by Collingtree's former education co-ordinator Julia Watson who last year led a joint chapter teambuilding trip to the Houses of Parliament. She commented: "This was a wonderful first-time experience for everyone. The unusual setting fostered some enthusiastic networking between members, two of whom went home having secured some new business!" •

Contact Julia Watson on 01604 621155. Picture courtesy of Wyvern Photography on 07770 484747.

Chiltern (Luton), Diamond (Chester), Fortune (Golders Green, N. London), Henge (Salisbury), Intrepid (Cardiff), Keane (Beckenham, SE London), New Heights (Leeds), Premier (Eynsham), Priory (Christchurch), Triumph (Marble Arch, London), Winners (Horsham, Sussex).

Meanwhile, the mainland Europe 'baker's dozen' of new chapters are: Germany: Ahorn (Hamburg), Balthasar (Cologne), Bonifatius (Fulda, Giessen-Fulda), Buche BNI (Düsseldorf),

Holbein (Frankfurt), Kurpfälzer (Schwetzigen, Heidelberg), Sieder (Schwaebisch Hall, Stuttgart), and Topas (Traunstein, Rössenheim-Traunstein). The Netherlands: Doppe (Stads kanaal, Groningen) and Ooievaar (Rijswijk, The Hague) and Saturnus (Utrecht). Switzerland: Buche (Inwil, Luzern) and Chasseral (Biel, Bern).

We wish every one of them great success – and look forward to reporting their progress. •

BREAKFAST BONANZA

The Director of Wakefield's Wealthbuilders Chapter, Nadine Hill, last month won a tough regional radio competition to become the listeners' choice to host a special two-hour show on Christmas Day. And she reckons she only won because of the public speaking practice she's gained through BNI!

Nadine, whose 'The Dream PA' company provides virtual office support for small businesses, entered the 'Gift of Time' contest when the BBC invited West Yorkshire-based listeners to 'Search for a (radio) Star'. After reaching the semi-finals with 16 other hopefuls, Nadine went to Radio Leeds' studios where they each recorded their 'minute to win it' on air, presenting their ideas for the Christmas Day show.

"Snippets from each of our showreels were played on air and then we were invited back to test our presenting skills. We had to produce a full show synopsis, saying how we'd run our show, what special guests we'd interview and the music we'd play. We were then let loose on listeners, presenting weather reports, pitching our ideas and introducing songs and dedications, allowing them to hear how the finalists put various parts of a show together," said a breathless Nadine.

Finally, the station's listeners voted for their favourite presenter and Nadine won with 37% of the total vote, well ahead of the second placed finalist with 30%. She added: "I was very excited. It's wonderful to be the recipient of the gift of time from the BBC because I'm usually the 'giver of time' when I'm working for my clients!"

"A key reason I was able to relax and be confident on air was because of all the practice I've been getting as Wealthbuilders' Chapter Director – speaking regularly in public for three months. And having attended BNI's presentation skills workshops also helped!"

Thanking everyone who voted for her and lent moral support, Nadine then told chapter colleagues: "Since my show is about the 'gift of time', I was planning to invite a few of you to be my special studio guests and offer tips to listeners about how to de-stress over the Christmas period. But then I thought you wouldn't thank me for dragging you away from your own families and turkey dinner!"

If you'd like to hear how Nadine performed, her Christmas Show can be downloaded as a podcast from her website at: www.thedreampa.co.uk •

Contact Nadine on 01924 899667 or at: enquiries@thedreampa.co.uk

Chapter Director wins her own Christmas radio show



RADIO STAR: Wakefield's Nadine Hill in the BBC studios, preparing for her own Christmas Day live radio show.



SHARING EVERYTHING: Husband and wife chapter directors Ali and Alex Hoffmann get up close and personal to benefit both their chapters!

Throughout the UK, neighbouring BNI chapters have long enjoyed friendly rivalry but, in the Roman city of Colchester, the competition has just got a whole lot more personal – so much so that it's even pursued in the marital bed!

Architect Alex Hoffmann is the energetic Director of Colchester's original Centurion Chapter. Meanwhile his wife, personal events organiser Ali Hoffmann, is the ambitious Director of the newer – and larger – Colchester Castle Chapter. Both groups meet in the city's Rose & Crown Hotel just 48 hours apart, and both want to be 'top dog' by the time they finish in office.

"Naturally we swap news and views about BNI and our own chapters, and like many married couples we'll often discuss our

Anything you can do... Say husband and wife rivals for Colchester crown!

respective ideas in bed. Inevitably, our close collaboration has already produced results in that I've found several visitors who might fill vacancies in my husband's chapter," she added.

It was pure co-incidence that saw the Hoffmanns elected chapter director at the same time. "When Alex came home and told me he was taking on the role, he was very surprised when I replied: 'So am I' – but after we'd laughed about it, we realised it offered advantages to both chapters since we could share the best practices of each group," she added.

Being members of rival chapters however, is no co-incidence, since it was the only way they could both enjoy the benefits of BNI, as Ali explained. "We have three young children and, with Alex's business based in central London we couldn't be out for early breakfast meetings at the same time, so being in separate chapters was the only way we could both join BNI. Even then, Alex has to delay his departure for work every Tuesday and get the children up, so that I can attend meetings."

Curiously, although Ali had been the first to seek out BNI some 15 months ago – she visited both Colchester groups while acting as

a substitute for a friend – it was Alex who first decided to join. She said: "My events company, Rose Quartz, helps busy business people arrange special occasions and gifts for their partners or family members, and I was looking for ways to market my business."

"During one of my visits to Centurion, I heard its architect was leaving, creating a vacancy I thought would be ideal for Alex. I arranged for him to go the following week and when I caught up with him after the meeting, he told me he had joined there and then, and urged me to do the same. The next week I attended Castle's Visitors Day and applied to join."

Alex said: "We are both dedicated to our chapters and work hard to make our groups as successful as possible, so there's bound to be some friendly rivalry. But there's no doubt it benefits us both to discuss new ideas for improving our chapters' performances and learn from each others' experiences. Hopefully it will mean both groups are stronger when we come to stand down." •

Contact Ali on 01206 233364 (website www.rose-quartz.co.uk) and Alex on 020 7253 2526.



A CHAPTER AFFAIR: All Barum Chapter members contributed to send their 'blushing bride' colleague, Karley Fricker, on a safari honeymoon.

KARLEY'S HONEYMOON IS A CHAPTER AFFAIR!

Blushing bride Karley Fricker has just received her best-ever referral from colleagues in Barnstable's Barum Chapter – a dream honeymoon safari trip to Kenya!

As one of Barum's founding members, interior designer Karley has given and received scores of valuable referrals, but none came close to the 'secret' referral slip that was recently handed to her by Chapter Director Caroline Bramwell – on behalf of all her BNI colleagues.

Caroline said: "Karley had always been one of our most popular and hard working members but when she planned her wedding during the autumn, she said a honeymoon was out of the question because she and her new bridegroom Mike had spent every penny on refurbishing their new marital home.

"Members of Barum Chapter have long believed the Givers Gain philosophy extends beyond pure business to personal friendships so when we learnt that Karley would not have a honeymoon, we decided to set up a 'secret squirrel' fund to send her on a dream honeymoon safari trip," she added.

Over a six-week period, emails between members bounced around the internet, while plenty of unmarked brown envelopes were discreetly passed to Caroline at the chapter's breakfast meetings, in total containing over £500 – more than enough for Karley and her photographer husband to book their delayed but memorable honeymoon which they'll be taking in a few weeks time.

Caroline, who runs fast-expanding Devon PR and marketing company, The Olden Group, added: "Tears were guaranteed when we gave Karley her surprise referral and then presented the happy couple with the honeymoon travel vouchers on their wedding day."

Karley, pictured above at her reception with Caroline (immediately to her right) and other Barum Chapter colleagues, commented: "I don't know how they managed to keep it from me at chapter meetings, but somehow they did – so it was a totally emotional surprise when they presented Mike and I with vouchers for our honeymoon. I've always wanted to go on a safari holiday, but never thought it would happen like this. It's a wonderful gesture by my BNI colleagues." ●

Contact Karley on 01271 863361

So that's what they mean by 'Raw Power'?

It's a well accepted fact within BNI, that the best referrals often come from the least expected quarter, at the least expected time...and that's certainly the case for Bradford travel agent Neil Hopwood.

Neil represents his agency, Redfern Travel, in the city's Raw Power Chapter where, nearly 12 months ago the group's signmaker, Richard Grant, had given him an introduction to a large event management company called Stage One, for whom Richard had previously worked.

Even though Richard had left Stage One a year before, he felt confident that the company could become an ideal client for Neil's travel agency business, so he encouraged Neil to keep the referral warm by staying in touch with them, and hope for a breakthrough.

It came suddenly, out of the blue, towards the end of last year when Neil took a call from Stage One who needed to fly more than 40 of

their staff to the Middle East, to set up a large event in Qatar. "Not only was I able to respond very quickly and save them money on the fares, but I also obtained an important extra baggage allowance for the company – and even arranged passes to the airport VIP lounge for its staff, so I think they were happy with the service I provided," said Neil.

"That one referral alone proved to be worth nearly £50,000 to Redfern and, because the booking worked out so well, I'm confident of winning more business from Stage One. It just proves that even seemingly dormant referrals can suddenly produce fantastic dividends, and I'm really grateful to Richard for his belief that something would eventually come out of this," he added.

Richard, who now runs his own large format printing and signmaking business, Kokoon, commented: "Having once worked with Stage One and knowing of their Qatar project, I had a strong feeling that Neil would be able to offer them an excellent travel service, so I told him to stay optimistic and he would eventually gain their business. It shows that you never know what's around the corner!" ●

Contact Neil on 01274 726424 and Richard on 01274 60001.



Jerzy drops in for Belfast breakfast – from Poland!



When Warsaw-based IT software specialist Jerzy Rygier was given the challenging brief from his Polish employers to find strategic partners in Northern Ireland for one of their new products, he knew exactly where to turn for help.

A few months earlier, Jerzy had been among the first of Warsaw's enthusiastic businessmen to become a member of BNI when the organisation launched its very first Polish chapter in the city – and he was confident that he'd soon find the answers he needed through the chapter finder and Network Central pages on BNI's European website.

Jerzy, who works for Theso, an IT and internet software firm in the Polish capital, said: "I joined my Warsaw Chapter some eight months ago and used the BNI website to identify Ryan Hay, the Director of Belfast City Chapter who was very willing to help me arrange a visit to his group. It was reassuring to know that when I got to Northern Ireland for my first-ever visit to the country, I'd at least be meeting friendly faces among BNI colleagues who might be able to offer their initial support."

By happy co-incidence, the first BNI member he met was Trevor Bradfield, a director of Lisburn-based Unity IT – precisely the type of business that Jerzy had set out to target! After a preliminary chat over breakfast, Trevor set up a meeting later the same day for Jerzy to meet his Unity colleagues and explore the possibilities for business collaboration.

Trevor, pictured (above) with Jerzy during their initial meeting, told SuccessNet: "It is still very early days, but we are looking at Jerzy's business plans and assessing whether there is an opportunity for us to be involved. Whatever the outcome, it does show that BNI membership reaches far beyond your own chapter, city and even country." ●

Contact Trevor on 028 9266 1190 and Jerzy on +44 22 853 89 32 or email jerzy.rygier@theso.pl

YOUR GREAT PRESENTATIONS

If you want to be noticed by your colleagues, make your 60-second and 10-minute presentations memorable! It's one of BNI's golden rules - and one that is drawing an ever-more creative response from members who, it seems, will do almost anything to ensure that their spot is THE BEST of the breakfast meeting. Here SuccessNet features a few of the latest performances that have come to our attention.



IT'S BATWOMAN! Sammy Blindell (right) and Gary Fowler dressed to make a (referral) killing at a recent Leeds North chapter meeting.

Batwoman flies in – with designs on Robin's 'web'

Wham! Blam! Grrrrzzap! It's Bat...WOMAN? And why not? The ever irrepressible members of Leeds North Chapter went to town – if not quite as far as Gotham City – to dress for the part when Chapter Director Nicola McDonald sent out the order: 'Next week, I want an animal to feature in all of your 60-second presentations...!'

Gosh, what were they to do? Nicola had suggested they liken their own business to an animal, urging them to come along in the guise of whatever four-legged (or two-legged) friend might best illustrate their respective companies. So it came as no surprise that there were more than a few 'beasts' of the jungle, along with a smattering of more elegant Safari creatures, and the odd domestic feline characature.

But while Batwoman (graphic designer Sammy Blindell) and Robin (web directory host Gary Fowler) might have been stretching the animal theme to its limits, their joint 120-second presentation – cleverly linking Sammy's design strengths with Gary's website development expertise - had colleagues roaring their appreciation.

"Had there been a prize for the most creative slot, they'd had flown away with it," said Nicola. "I was genuinely astonished at some of our members' creativity. Everyone made an effort to meet the animal theme I'd set for the breakfast meeting, and it was obvious that it had the desired effect. Leeds North has always enjoyed a reputation for being a dynamic, go-getting chapter so when the new leadership team took over, we wanted to give a fresh boost to the group's ebullience to maintain energy levels over the next six months."

Nicola, a Sage software consultant with Argentica, added: "For something so off-the-wall, it made a great impression with our visitors that morning, one of whom turned up rather earlier than expected, just seconds after Gary (Robin) had arrived to perform his visitor host duties. We were a little worried that she and the other guests might wonder what on earth they'd walked into, but we were reassured at the end when two of them actually handed in membership application forms!" • [Contact Nicola on 07973 844782](mailto:ContactNicola@07973844782)

Hats on – for a Christmas Big Breakfast!

They arrived as if heading for a fancy dress party, but the members of four Hampshire chapters who recently converged on a sedate clifftop hotel in Bournemouth, had just two things on their minds – hanging onto a silly hat, and a

determination to get noticed and gain some great referrals!

Chapter delegates were guests of Bournemouth Bay Chapter's 'Christmas Big Breakfast' which followed the now traditional "Wear a hat that represents your business" theme, allied to a quick-fire dream referral session in which all of the 70-plus participants had just 20 seconds to identify their ideal business introduction, in the hope that one or more of their BNI colleagues would be able to deliver them the perfect referral.

And for one visiting member, sales training and personal development consultant Chris Milner from Poole's Dolphin Chapter, the session achieved just that – twice over! She'd asked colleagues to find her a very specific referral into Marks & Spencer's head office at

HATS ON: Delegates from several Hampshire chapters wearing hats to represent their businesses at Bournemouth Bay's Big Christmas Breakfast.

Marble Arch in the hope of persuading the High Street multiple to use her expertise in its ongoing customer service training for staff.

To her great surprise, two members around the breakfast table announced that they could fulfil her dream referral, as a result of which Chris has now been able to make her formal approach to the High Street store group and is looking forward to detailed discussions this month. She said: "It was such a specific referral I wanted that I never dreamt anyone would respond. When two members shouted out that they could help me, I was astounded. But that's the great power of BNI."

Meanwhile, there were prizes galore for the daftest hats on display (and there were plenty) and rations of special Christmas cheer (in a bottle) to keep spirits high throughout this popular annual event. •

Photo: Courtesy of Noel White at Rowan White Photography on 01202 518618.





Cassie goes back to bed at Leeds chapter

SLEEPING ON THE JOB? No, it's just Cassie Webster, a visitor to Network Central Chapter's breakfast meeting, helping bed specialist Carl Walsh with his 10-minute presentation!

We all know the early start of BNI breakfast meetings has deterred more than a few visitors from applying to become members – but is that any reason to invite your guests to go straight to bed as soon as they've arrived?

One enterprising member of Leeds Network Central Chapter, beds specialist Carl Walsh from the city's Divan Centre, clearly thought this was a good idea – which is how visitor Cassie Webster recently found herself getting an extra ten minutes 'lie in' shortly after the meeting started when, to the considerable mirth of chapter members, she was co-opted by Carl to demonstrate the comfort of one of his products.

Carl's carefully planned 10-minute presentation saw him set up a single bed between the breakfast tables, complete with bedside cabinet and an 'amazing living plant' display to create a relaxing ambience, provided by BNI colleague James Steel's company, Dodsworths. The only thing missing was someone to occupy the bed and, as one of his chapter's guests that morning, Cassie seemed the ideal volunteer.

As she made herself comfortable between the breakfast plates and coffee cups, Carl went on to deliver a memorable description of his company's products and services, prompting Chapter Director David Roberts to comment: "We believe that extending a warm welcome to our visitors and conducting

ourselves in a professional way is the best way to demonstrate our success as a strong and effective business group. However, we don't normally invite guests to have a lie down and take a nap during our meeting...unless there's a very good reason for doing so, and in Carl's case, it was brilliantly effective, leaving everyone in no doubt that he sells great beds."

Cassie, an events director said afterwards: "I'd been told that BNI would make me very welcome but until Carl asked me to volunteer to be a living prop for his presentation that morning, I had no idea just how far they'd go to make me comfortable! It was an unusual but amusing experience." ●

Contact Carl Walsh on 0113 243 3616.

Liang shows a strong stomach for business!

What's this then – a punch-up at a BNI meeting? Surely not! In fact your eyes don't deceive you, because the man delivering what would normally be a knock-out blow is Dan Lewis, a Middlesex County Kick Boxing Champion – and judging from the facial expressions of watching members, it should have hurt, a lot!

Happily, the recipient of Dan's stomach-churning punch – Acupuncturist, Doctor of Chinese Medicine and martial arts expert, Dr Liang Shan – is a man accustomed to soaking up harsh physical treatment, and he'd invited his BNI colleague to hit him as hard as possible, to highlight his own skills to fellow members of the Tudor Chapter at Teddington's Lensbury Club in South-West London.

The 'incident' marked a dramatic culmination to Liang's highly-colourful and most unusual 10-minute presentation which first saw him inserting acupuncture needles into the face and hands of Membership Co-ordinator Liz Coombs, before performing some mesmerising QiGong (holistic health) exercises to increase energy, restore vitality and reduce stress, and finally showing chapter colleagues the value of being a martial arts Kung Fu master!

After watching in awe as Liang graphically demonstrated his expertise, Membership Committee member John Frye said: "Dr Shan is a highly regarded member of our chapter but most of us normally see him as a quiet, mild-mannered professional, so the content of his recent 10-minute presentation surprised everyone and, at different times, had us both grimacing on his behalf and smiling in admiration.

"It was quite a performance, offering a superb and memorable display of his professional talents – and it has raised the bar for future ten-minute presenters. We're now looking forward to the presentation that can top it! "



TAKE THAT! Tudor Chapter's martial arts expert, Dr Liang Shan (left) proving that he has the stomach for big business – taking a gut-wrenching punch from colleague Dan Lewis, a kick-boxing champion.

Meanwhile, Liz was emphatic that she didn't feel any pain or discomfort beyond a slight tingling when Liang's needles found some of her basic acupuncture points, although both doctor and 'patient' agreed that a longer session in less public surroundings would provide greater therapeutic effect. ●

Contact Dr Liang Shan on 07766 503048, Liz Coombs on 020 8240 4255 and Dan Lewis on 07985 201277. Photograph courtesy of John Frye Photography – 020 8894 6573 and www.johnfrye.co.uk

REFERRAL OF THE QUARTER

Robert gets specific – and nets a cool £1.5M profit!

It pays to practice what you preach – literally! Just ask Robert Nunn, whose company expects to make a stunning £1.5 million profit this year from an opportunistic deal he landed – only because he asked a colleague in his Bedford Enterprise Chapter for a specific introduction to a major supermarket retailer.

Robert's business, emedia, is the brains and driving force behind the latest VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) internet phone just launched by supermarket giants, Aldi, which expects to net at least 250,000 UK customers during 2007, and another one million-plus in Germany and France when the product is introduced to mainland Europe later this year.

The £1.5 million figure is Robert's conservative estimate of the minimum annual profit value of his introduction to one of Aldi's senior buyers by chapter colleague, print manufacturing and fulfilment company boss Stephen Spencer.

When SuccessNet caught up with him hours after the new service's UK launch, he was modest about his success. "It just came out

of a routine one-to-one with Steve over a pint. We already knew each other's businesses pretty well, so I simply asked if he could put me in touch with the Aldi buyer responsible for technical products. He already had good connections in the retail sector and was happy to use his contacts at Aldi to gain the vital introduction for me. Within weeks we'd drawn together the expertise to provide them with a seamless, first-class service," said Robert.

His capture of the remarkable deal was fitting reward for practising what he regularly 'preached' to his Enterprise colleagues during his recent six-month tenure as chapter director. "I always tell members they need to be specific and direct when asking their chapter colleagues to find them referrals. If you know who you need to speak to in any given organisation, there's no point asking for a general referral," he said. "In this case, I trusted Stephen would refer me to the right person, and he delivered an introduction – the crucial part of the process!"

While Stephen's own hopes for clinching a deal with the same retailer initially failed to materialise, his company, GWAH, is now in line to gain their business – ironically via emedia's VoIP contract. He commented: "I got to know Robert very well when we both served on our chapter's leadership team and I'd long thought the missing link in bringing his company's technical creativity to the market place was its lack of a leading multiple retailer client, so I'm very pleased I could make the connection for him."

Contact Robert on 01234 223371 and Stephen on 01234 271188.



NINA PUTS COLLEAGUES IN SPOTLIGHT

IN THE SPOTLIGHT: Just some of Nina's chapter colleagues whose support helped her launch a regional magazine – and who have now been featured in it!

Part of Kent now has its own monthly magazine, thanks to the initial advertising support it attracted from BNI members when its fledgling editor was a last-minute visitor to her local chapter.

Nina Ludgate heard about BNI 18 months ago while she was struggling to attract the advertising support required for her first foray into publishing – a new periodical called Essential Tenterden.

"At a quarter to five one Monday evening, my first (and only) advertiser suggested I should pay a visit to the local BNI group and by a quarter to seven the following morning I was at the Tenterden Chapter," she recalled. "I only had a brief opportunity to tell members about my plans, but they were instantly supportive, and five bought advertising space. The

following week another five pledged support, and I was able to launch just six weeks later."

Nina was delighted and immediately joined the chapter, since when her business has continued to grow, thanks largely to referrals from chapter colleagues. Her publication has also expanded with a new title 'Essential Weald & Rother' covering a wider area with a circulation of 17,000 copies.

Members who supported Nina's early publishing days have seen their commitment repaid in the form of features and articles she has written about them and she added: "They've been really good to me and, by taking the time to understand their businesses, I now hope to repay them with good referrals as well as publicity." •

Contact Nina on 01580 213400.

RICHARD'S 'MOVING TRIBUTE' TO BNI SUCCESS

The boss of a thriving Coventry-based IT support company is so pleased with the benefits of BNI membership that he's had a permanent tribute sign-written onto the firm's first service van.

Prime Solutions 4 Business (PS4B) marked its first anniversary by taking on three new staff – an engineer, customer service manager and senior technical support manager – pictured (below) with the company's vehicle whose side and rear panels proclaim: "We are a proud member of BNI www.bnicoventry.co.uk – A Great Way to Network".

The IT technical support company offers computer and networking services to ensure businesses run efficiently and effectively, and its Managing Director Richard Hooper happily acknowledges that had he not joined Coventry's Godiva Chapter just four weeks after launching his new venture, his firm's rapid growth would simply not have happened.

He said: "Becoming a BNI member was the best business decision I made, and much of our early work has come through referrals from chapter colleagues. When I decided to promote BNI on our vehicle, it wasn't just a 'thank you' for giving us a fantastic start, but a reflection of my belief that BNI is the perfect partner for any growing business – a view I want to share with other local entrepreneurs."

Being part of a worldwide networking organisation has already proved its value for Richard's company. "I was recently contacted by a Bolton Metro Chapter member, David Lloyd, who runs a computer reselling business. After supplying a new system to one of his Coventry clients, he needed a local IT firm to provide the client with ongoing support, so David used BNI's website to search for such a company in Coventry.

"He found us – and now we've negotiated an ongoing service contract with his client – giving his firm added value in the eyes of the client, and providing us with valuable new ongoing business."

With his wife Kerry as the company's Operations and Finance Director, Richard is confident the next 12 months will be even more successful. "My BNI colleagues know my company is based on quality and personal service, and that's why they have given me such fantastic support. Much of our early success is due to them." •

Contact Richard Hooper on 02476 224040.

VAN MAN WITH A MESSAGE: Richard Hooper (left) is so pleased with his growth through Godiva Chapter that he's promoting BNI on his firm's new van.





WE'RE ALL GOING TO WIN: Members of Nottingham's rival Forest and Central (County) chapters get 'red-carded' by referee, BNI Director Steve Jennings, who wants everyone to be a winner!

moved here," said Secretary/Treasurer Craig Williamson.

"We had to find a new meeting venue because we'd outgrown our hotel venue and everyone is delighted with our new home, not least because it provides a great talking point when we're inviting visitors and, as the home of the oldest football league club in the country it has always been an attractive venue," he added.

"Ironically, our move to what most people would regard as a male-dominated sports bastion, comes hard on the heels of our attracting the Chapter's first female members, whose presence has already created a refreshing change of ambience at our breakfasts," said Craig.

"We have always been a strong chapter, regardless of how many members we had, but with a new venue and a bullish leadership team, I believe our current membership of 26 will soon increase considerably. Our referral levels are very good and we're bringing in plenty of visitors, so the future's bright - or perhaps black and white!"

The group also believes in playing hard and enjoying their business camaraderie both inside and away from weekly meetings. Just one result has been the creation of a chapter five-a-side soccer team - resplendent in BNI-burgundy strip - which is already doing well in an established local league, having won its first game 8-1. Craig said: "We'll be asking our Forest Chapter colleagues to form a team - and who knows, maybe it'll provide a rare occasion when the lads from Notts County can give their bigger Notts Forest rivals a good hiding!"

Contact Craig on 0115 959 6488 or 07968 445865

It's County v Forest in BNI's Notts derby!

While several BNI chapters have chosen major football arenas as their home, none can have created as much stir - or friendly rivalry - as Nottingham's resurgent Central Chapter which this month moved into Notts County's famous old Meadow Lane stadium - directly across the River Trent from Forest Chapter's 'home' at the more illustrious Nottingham Forest's City Ground!

And their New Year arrival seemed too good an opportunity to miss for a spot of good-humoured jousting and one-

upmanship between members of the two adjacent chapters, when they met for an informal 'getting to know you' session on the pitch at Meadow Lane - especially when Central's newest 'signing' was none other than former Notts County soccer star, Les Bradd, whose heroics as the Club's highest-ever goal-scorer in the 1970s earned him cult status among County fans.

"It was largely through our former chapter director, Martin Bell and his business association with Les - now County's Commercial Director - that we

Single Referral Produces Perfect Partnership

Four months after joining Nottingham's Plains Chapter, a signage company has had its entire future guaranteed by a single referral that has seen it transformed from a two-man signwriting business into one of the region's major players handling work for prestigious national clients.

Initially, the referral passed to Mark Horley, the Managing Director of Solo Sign Solutions, looked modest - involving his company producing some complex digital printing work for another, much larger signage company which lacked the specialist resources to meet its client's requirements.

But the larger company was so impressed with the quality of Solo's work and the commitment of its small team, that they made Mark a business marriage proposal he couldn't refuse. 'Why don't you take over the production of all our signage work, and move in with us?' they asked.

Which is exactly what happened, as Mark's colleague, Graphics Manager Ben Lockley explained. "This wasn't a takeover or merger because we remain two separate companies, but it was the birth of a perfect partnership. They now concentrate on sales and marketing, and the installations - while we handle all the creative and production side of the business. It's an ideal mix because it has removed the pressure of us having to constantly look for new work, while it has enabled our host company to do what it does best - attracting big-name clients."

Ben added: "Everything has happened so quickly. We helped launch the Plains Chapter last April. In August the group's chartered accountant David Groves passed us this amazing referral and within three months we'd moved out of our small lock-up shop into our partner's huge premises.

"More importantly, we've been given ongoing contracts worth well over £100,000 a year, working for national clients like The Army, Kenco Coffee, Coral and BetFred betting shops, and Londis, and there's every reason to believe this figure will continue to grow, making David's referral even more valuable."

Although Mark and Ben were initially surprised to find themselves working for a rival sign company, the partnership has blossomed so well that they're now seeking similar relationships with other signage firms and printers throughout the UK - especially those requiring large format printing and high-level digital printing. "That one referral has transformed our business, which shows why BNI is such an amazing networking organisation. We recommend it to everyone," Ben added.

Contact Ben on 07931 218671

M E M B E R S A W A R D S S P E C I A L SIMPLY THE BEST

BNI is far more than merely the world's biggest, most successful business referral organisation. It also provides invaluable business skills and leadership training, education and wide-ranging support to its members. So it comes as no surprise that an increasing number of BNI members are receiving tangible proof of their enhanced business expertise, by gaining top national and regional awards in their respective business sectors. On this page, SuccessNet recognises the achievements of some of the latest members to win industry recognition for their enterprise....

Courier company delivers top award

Proving that not every courier firm is the same, Denise Fresco from Walthamstow's Central Chapter celebrated her company's second year anniversary by being voted the outright winner of North London's Enterprise Enfield Business of the Year Award, sponsored by the RSA Trust.

For Denise, past Chapter Director and a founder member, victory was particularly sweet coming so soon after she and her husband Mark gave up entirely different careers to launch their family-run same-day courier company based in Edmonton called, appropriately, The Courier Service.

She said: "I'd had many different jobs before deciding to go into the transport sector, including retail sales posts, purchasing manager for an airline and even working on market stalls. But a couple of years ago the time felt right to do something different. Mark and I were both interested in the courier sector, and felt we could offer a more personal and reliable service than many existing couriers, so with my niece getting involved as well, we took the plunge."

In little more than two years, The Courier Service has shown many a larger rival that customer care and quality really do count, by winning several prestigious contracts such as delivering Football League club match programmes – one job that has to be there on time!

Denise, pictured below (far left) added: "We were really thrilled to win the top award so soon after launching our company. There's no doubt that the ongoing business training and support provided by BNI has helped us. In my view it's the Rolls Royce of all business referral organisations and I'm happy to tell anyone I'm a 'BNI believer'." ●

Contact Denise on 0870 224 4447 or at: denise@thecourierservice.co.uk



The Horizon's green for Romford members

A member of Romford's Horizon Chapter has helped her recycling company achieve major success in local business awards after persuading a significant part of the Essex business community to adopt 'green' credentials.

Barbara Peacock, the Chapter's Secretary/Treasurer won the plaudits of her fellow members when she announced that her business, Cartridge World Upminster, had won both the Havering Best Environmental Business of the Year Award and The Essex Environmental Awareness Award, as well as being beaten finalists in three other award categories.

And naturally, her "cradle to grave" approach to the environment started by educating her own chapter colleagues, threequarters of whom she has already converted to use recycled ink and toner cartridges that would otherwise have gone into a local landfill site. She said: "I'm very proud of them and I hope I'll continue the greening of the Horizon (chapter) in the near future!" ●

Blue photo wins it for Newcastle snapper!

Newcastle's Collingwood Chapter photographer John Watson certainly didn't have the blues when he found out he'd won the prestigious 'True Blue' competition staged by the city's Art Works Galleries.

Local artists were invited to submit a work of art with a blue theme and visiting members of the public were then asked to vote for their favourite entry, ensuring the eventual winner would be the 'people's choice'.

As the outright winner, John has been awarded free gallery space to exhibit more of his work, something he hopes will assist his business expansion plans to provide art works for local companies and take on more commercial clients.

A member of BNI for barely six months, John said: "I'd like to think my success reflects my devotion and enthusiastic approach to creating distinct images, and I've already had some prestigious clients such as Porsche and Audi. I've also had half a dozen referrals from chapter colleagues, but of even greater value has been the personal development side. Having to learn how to present my business succinctly has been a huge benefit." ●

Putney boasts 'Travel Agent of the Universe'

While a number of BNI's travel agent members have won awards for the quality of their customer service or creativity, a relative newcomer to the industry has become our first member to win 'Best Travel Website' in The Guardian and Observer's coveted annual travel awards.

Putney-based Black Tomato, a member of Riverside Chapter in London SW15, was formed recently by three young men – Tom Marchant, James Merrett and Matt Smith – who share a passion for new travel experiences 'and seeing what our planet has to offer.'

Matt said: "While our 'offer' is different to almost any other travel company, it was still a huge coup to have our website voted top by such a distinguished panel of experts."

Why Black Tomato? Matt added: "It's a refined variety of the fruit found in rare locations and climates, but when discovered it offers an amazing tasting experience. We give our customers the Black Tomato of travel experiences." ●

Contact Matt on 020 7610 9008 or visit the award-winning site at: www.blacktomato.co.uk

Olive Tree teaches Christine to flourish

As a primary school teacher, Christine Boyd found her teaching career fulfilling in almost every way – but it was never going to provide a financially comfortable retirement – so she did what many people do and looked to invest in bricks and mortar.

Eight months ago she joined the flourishing property investment group, Olive Tree International, becoming its first 'non-financial' business partner based in Durham, before deciding that she also needed to join BNI, choosing Newcastle's Eldon Chapter.

And after a whirlwind introduction to the world of international property investment, completing 40 deals within her first few

months, Christine and her fellow partners have been rewarded by being named runners-up in the International Business of the Year category of the prestigious Startups Awards 2006 sponsored by NatWest.

She said her only problem in persuading BNI colleagues to look seriously at property investment, was condensing its benefits into 60 seconds a week. "I've not been a member for long, but I can see how valuable BNI is going to be. There's no doubt that joining a major property investment group and BNI were two decisions I should have made a long time ago." ●

Contact Christine on 0191 386 1517.



FROM THE CHAIR

Alpha by name and Alpha by Nature

says Paul Dooley
& Dean Scrutton,
Chapter Director
and Secretary/
Treasurer of
Liverpool's
burgeoning
Alpha Chapter



ALL SMILES: Paul Dooley, Chapter Director

With 46 members, Liverpool's Alpha Chapter is the biggest in Europe and, while there's a BNI group in Montreal whose website claims it is 'The Earth's largest chapter', we've been talking to its leadership team - and warned them that we intend to become the biggest and best in the world.

Of course we know that BNI recommends 45 members as the optimum chapter size, but we also know it is no co-incidence that BNI's largest chapters are also its most successful. Of course they are! At 46-strong, our weekly referral rate has never been higher, and the resulting business generated has never been better.

So when anyone asks why we should want to build Alpha to become an even larger team, our response is "Why not? - especially when it means we'll more than double the volume of business we're already doing." In short, size matters - and we want to be the biggest.

Not that we are unaware of the potential pitfalls of expansion. We constantly re-assess the impact of our growth every time we add a member to our group. We regularly ask all our members how they feel about the changing dynamics of a larger chapter where, for example, we've already had to tighten up our 60-second presentations, simply to get through our agenda. There were one or two

dissenting voices who didn't want to be hurried, but the vast majority concurred with the leadership team that if it means getting more referrals, they were happy to keep their infomercials snappy.

There are some obvious reasons for our continuing growth:

- We make a point of giving every single member a role to play in the chapter; we nurture our members, make them feel wanted, and keep them informed and involved.
- We run a range of incentive schemes - like dividing the chapter into teams of three-members, each of which is required to introduce visitors in three designated trades or professions whom we want to attract - and rewarded when we've filled that position.
- Attracting visitors is an ongoing priority, and all members know this. On one recent visitors day, there were 100 people, with our guests outnumbering the members. We also run bi-monthly speed-networking sessions - a great way to introduce potential members to BNI - and at our last session there were 10 members and 50 visitors!
- We believe a high-profile chapter is a dynamic one - so we keep Alpha in the local news as much as possible, through press releases and chats with journalists about our activities.
- We have a very active social calendar and

every week various members will meet each other at events ranging from wine tasting sessions and meals to a simple drinks party.

- Our Member of the Month Trophy is so coveted that there is fierce competition among members as they clamour to get their name on the shield at least once in the year.
- Above all else, both the leadership team and members work continuously to improve the chapter. The moment you take your foot off the pedal and ease up is the time complacency sets in - and being a member of Alpha Chapter doesn't allow for that.

Consequently, our member retention rate is exceptionally high because members get excellent business and value their seats accordingly. Sure BNI can be a full-time job in itself but, what do you give a busy person? More work of course - and they'll come back for even more.

We make every meeting special. We're lucky to have a fantastic bunch of members, many of whom are natural comedians so we never get through a meeting without everyone falling about with laughter. But that fosters even greater camaraderie and makes everyone more determined to find referrals for each other. We work hard and play hard.

Our success is not just a happy coincidence. Our chapter works as a cohesive unit, and if anything Alpha's Chapter Director has the easiest job, thanks to such a superb team of officers and members all working hard for the good of the chapter, each other and of course, themselves.

Have no doubt, we'll continue to grow larger, but don't for a moment think we'll take just anyone. If anything, the bigger we get, the more choosy we are. And that is just the way it should be. •

Paul Dooley (tel: 0151 425 3535) is a plumbing and heating engineer whose company is Planet Plumbing Services. Dean Scrutton (tel: 01704 841634) runs Iridium8, providing a wide range of organisational and project management concierge services to both business and private clients.



GIRL POWER: Alpha Chapter's female members ensure that the UK's largest BNI group reflects a healthy feminine perspective.



train & gain

EVERYBODY KNOWS EVERYTHING!

Says
Charlie
Robertson,
Co-Executive
Director,
West Scotland

Did you know that the top 2% of the population work all day long as if everyone was watching them, even if no-one is watching them at all? But why, and what does this mean? Isn't it true that in every walk of life, the real 'workers' get on with it whether or not they're being watched, just as the shirkers don't do any real work even when they are being watched!?

Relating this to BNI, we usually only meet our chapter colleagues at a weekly breakfast meeting, yet we instinctively know who the really active members are even though we haven't seen them all week. Which means it's not just about the number of referrals passed – but rather, the ongoing commitment that a member shows throughout the week towards his fellow members!

I once had a chapter colleague who passed an average of 20 referrals a month but she was not regarded as a good 'participator' by fellow members. How could that be? She worked for a solicitor and her conveyancing department simply passed four or five referrals a week to the surveyor in the chapter, without her involvement. Her secretary even wrote out the referral slips.

She never took any positions on the Leadership Team, never brought visitors, never had one-to-one's, never turned up at social events and most weeks was late for her chapter meeting. Her attendance was poor and the category was eventually opened, despite her having won notable networker certificates six times in eight months!

Good work habits or efficiency can be described as doing things right, while effectiveness is doing the right things. Ask yourself: "What is the most valuable use of my time right now?". Is what you are doing an IRA (income reducing activity) or an IPA (income producing activity).

Anything you do to grow your chapter, by bringing visitors, finding referrals for your colleagues, or building relationships through one-to-ones, is an IPA. It is a good use of your time because growing your chapter and building relationships has a serious effect on the return you can expect from your investment in BNI.

If you want to make a quantum leap in your career, or grow your business (or BNI chapter), there are many things you can do to accelerate your success. Here are just three.

- **Acquire Education:** Read books. We live in a knowledge-based society where the highest

valued people are those who know more than others. As Brian Tracy once said: "People who have a TV larger than their library will never succeed in business."

- **Acquire Skills:** Attend BNI workshops. Your level of ability in your field will determine the quality and quantity of your results, or, as Bear Bryant put it: "It's not the will to win but the will to prepare to win that counts."

- **Acquire Contacts:** Network outside BNI. It's all about people; your success will be decided by the number of people who know you in a favourable way; people who know you, like you and trust you. You must network continually to broaden your contacts.

Most people in business have heard of goal-setting but few ever get around to doing it. If you plan the activities necessary to achieve your goals, they have a much higher possibility of succeeding.

Less than a year ago, our Scotland West region had seven chapters with fewer than 20 members, so we set a goal of getting all of our chapters above 20 within six months, and put in place the necessary training, support, morale boosting, and a commitment to building members' skills. We visited chapters and showed members that we believed in them and would support them. Everyone worked their socks off and just five months later every chapter in the region had over 20 members, with referral rates growing as a direct result.

This remarkable achievement has come about because members now believe they can succeed. The history of the human race is one of ordinary people who have overcome their fears to accomplish extraordinary things. That's something worth remembering! •

KNOWING WHO'S WHO: Executive Director
Charlie Robertson.



Smile and the world smiles with you - Say Thank You and you are never alone

Says James Cruickshank, Executive Director for East Anglia



SMILE says James Cruickshank

If you were to ask a group of business professionals what their goals are for 2007, most would respond by saying they wanted more customers. Laudable in its intent, but goal-setting needs more application than simply a wish list.

I am constantly amazed by the attitude of some catering establishments who, on the one hand advertise for more business, only to effectively turn business away when new customers present themselves. "How is this done?" I hear you ask. Quite simply they forget, or do not appreciate, the power of fulfilling the basics, and one of the most basic factors in securing any long and lasting business is to – SMILE.

We are all consumers, so the next time you purchase anything, whether it be in a shop, hotel or local hostelry, make a point of noticing how many of those to whom you hand over your hard earned cash, actually look you in the eye, smile and say 'Thank You'. My personal survey reveals that those who do, amount to just one in 10 – on a good day!

The other 'basic' is saying thank you for the business, or in the BNI context, the referrals you receive. It has been estimated that having a structured approach to saying 'Thank You' increases your business by a minimum of 17%. Hardly surprising then, that many business professionals are now

realising the importance of saying thank you, and are taking steps to build a system into their procedures whereby their customers automatically receive a thank you card. They do this by using companies like SendoutCards.com who structure the process of sending thank you cards in the most cost-effective way.

Smiling and saying thank you costs nothing, but they can have a dramatic effect on those who are on the receiving end, especially visitors to your chapter. Chapters whose members make a point of smiling and greeting visitors warmly, tend to grow quickly and even more so, when their Membership Committees take the time to write and say "Thank you for coming; we enjoyed your company". In contrast, chapters that ignore this basic courtesy invariably remain static.

The good news is that if you consciously take steps to put systems in place to cover both these aspects, you can be sure that many of your competitors will still be ignoring these basic principles. By adopting them you will be streets ahead - and surprise, surprise - a lot happier yourself.

Not long ago the shares of Marks & Spencer were languishing at around the £3.50 mark. The newly appointed CEO, Stuart Rose, was charged with the difficult task of revitalising the famous company and increasing footfall within the stores. He focussed on the product range at first, but then he did something that other management teams often consider to be of no consequence. He actively encouraged his staff to SMILE.

Last month my wife and I received a card from Mr Rose himself, thanking us for our business and inviting us to visit our nearest Marks & Spencers store to partake of a glass of wine. Our subsequent visit was not so much a shopping trip but more an 'experience' and we could not help but notice how the business had changed for the better.

As a musical trio played melodies to entertain shoppers, there were indeed smiles all round, not least on the faces of Marks & Spencers shareholders, who had just learned that the share price had nearly doubled to £6.85!

You can start the process of thanking customers today. Then watch your business grow. ●

What's this – a solicitor offering free advice?

To his surprised clients, Darlington solicitor Philip St G. Stephenson belongs to a rare breed: a lawyer who offers good advice free of charge!

Philip, a partner in Darling & Stephenson Solicitors, has been an ardent BNI enthusiast for four years and whenever he meets a new client, you can guarantee he'll have his trusty red book close at hand because he never misses an opportunity to promote BNI and the services of its members.

He said: "I keep my large BNI business card holder on my desk and with every available opportunity I tell my clients about the advantage of using the skills and expertise of my fellow members, and offer them an additional free service by making personal recommendations to any relevant colleagues whom I believe will be able to help them."

What is therefore no surprise at all, is that since Philip became a founder member of the new Prince Bishop Chapter in 2005, he has been able to pass a remarkable 500 referrals in barely 21 months, generating significant business for other members in the group.

To further promote BNI, his law firm displays 'silent salesman' business card boards in the reception areas of its two offices, while waiting clients are invited to browse through Philip's bulging BNI business card book full of members' business cards and ask for further details about any product or service in which they're interested.

To keep himself up to date with the latest business trends and practices, Philip regularly attends BNI's training workshops where he is often asked to impart his own experiences to benefit colleagues. ●

Contact Philip on 01325 489000 or at: philips@darlingstephensons.co.uk

MAN IN A HURRY? Darlington solicitor Philip Stephenson whose free advice has helped him pass 500 referrals in under two years.





Angela's BNI dream-team creates winner

How many times have you promised yourself that you'd take up a new sport or hobby, or fulfil a lifelong ambition to do something completely different, "if only I could find someone to do it with...."

From next month, the lack of a kindred spirit to help fulfil your wildest dreams will no longer stop you, thanks to the imminent launch of an enterprising on-line service - GOWITHME - the brainchild of Harrogate's White Rose Chapter solicitor, Angela Davies.

"It's a website for meeting people who want to share in a particular activity," said Angela. "Quite simply, whatever you want to do, you can use GOWITHME to find someone who shares the same desire and who will want to do it with you!" she said.

A founder White Rose member, Angela realised that her colleagues were the ideal people to get the project up and running. "They are a team of great professionals and I'm lucky I can rely on them to give my venture the best start," she added.

Consequently, GOWITHME has become an ongoing chapter project. Adam Lloyd of Turn Design designed the "brand" website and stationery, while website manager Chris Smith-Dunn of Harrogate On-line, has provided organisational advice, with the site being built by Linda and Remo Biagioni of Businets.

DREAMING UP A WINNER: Harrogate solicitor and entrepreneur Angela Davies (second left, front row) with some of the White Rose Chapter colleagues who've helped create a unique website venture.

The chapter's printer, Philip Broadbank of Enid Taylor & Co has produced high quality stationery, Mark Deighton of De-Signs, took charge of the sign-writing, and online marketing expert John Carnell of Bullying On-line has provided specialist advice on maximising the website's profile and advertising appeal. Finally, Angela turned to White Rose's mortgage adviser Jonathan Baggaley of Harrogate FS Ltd to raise the necessary start-up capital by remortgaging the family home, while the chapter's accountant, Paul Bushell from Bushells, is waiting to offer his financial expertise when the new business takes off.

She added: "Without this fantastic group of people around me, I could not have set up my new business so quickly, with so much confidence, and so little anxiety."

Although GOWITHME is a free website, Angela is determined its 'offshoot' services will provide benefits to disadvantaged sections of the community. "One thing close to my heart is to provide help for divorced fathers who are reduced to taking their estranged children to McDonalds on a wet Sunday afternoon during strained contact visits because they have nowhere to go, and no-one else to share such sad occasions. The website will help them meet others in the same circumstances, offering mutual support and friendship." •

Contact Angela on 01423 772860 and, from mid-February you'll be able to share your aspirations by visiting www.gowithme.co.uk

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

What can I do if I can't get to a chapter meeting – who should I turn to as a substitute? My colleagues are passing me useful leads, but aren't giving me those 'killer' referrals – what should I do? I go to lots of networking events, but spend most of time wandering around aimlessly – how can I work the room more effectively?

These and many more questions are raised by our members all the time – and rightly so, because it shows you value your seat at the BNI breakfast table and want to make the very most of your membership.

But do you easily find the answers to your questions? Do you know who, or where, to turn to for help if you encounter a particular problem – however large or small? And would you appreciate a mechanism whereby you could raise queries or obtain answers promptly?

Well now you'll be able to, because from the next (Spring) issue of SuccessNet onwards, we'll be running a new quarterly column called 'Your Questions Answered' in which BNI directors will seek to provide simple, unequivocal answers to any problems you have – whether about your membership, your chapter, BNI rules and procedures, or general networking issues.

So if you need an answer to a pressing question, summarise your query as succinctly as possible by email, typing 'My Question Answered' into the subject line, and then send it to us at: bniuk@eurobni.com.

We'll aim to publish some of those (with answers) which we feel are likely to be of greatest interest to other members and, if for any reason you wish to remain anonymous, your personal details will not be published nor otherwise divulged. •

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you and SuccessNet...

SuccessNet is published quarterly and distributed free of charge by BNI to all members. We are delighted that with each successive edition, we receive more and more of your emails, letters and calls, asking us to include your news or picture items in the newsletter - but please remember we don't have space for them all!

If you have an item you'd like us to consider for inclusion, please email it to: successnet@grosvenorassociates.com - making sure you include your phone numbers (office and mobile) and address as well. •