

SuccessNet

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EDUCATION *and* INFORMATION BULLETIN *for* BNI MEMBERS



**HOW MUCH BUSINESS WAS DONE
AT *YOUR* BIG BREAKFAST ?**

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LAWSON'S' LORE

Truth or Delusion? To be good at networking, you have to be a real 'people person'? When you give business referrals to others, you can expect them to give you referrals in return? If you provide good customer service, people *will* refer business to you and, the more you promote yourself, the more referrals you'll get?

Even if you think you know all there is to know about successful referral marketing, the answers to these and a host of other common assumptions about word-of-mouth networking might give you more than a few surprises.

The fact is that no matter how good your referral skills, nor however long you've been refining the business techniques taught by BNI, you are still likely to hold a number of fundamental misconceptions about what it really takes to be an accomplished networker. Why? Because the business world is full of inaccurate presumptions on a subject that, despite being a vital element of the marketing mix, is still absent from almost every business curriculum in our colleges and universities.

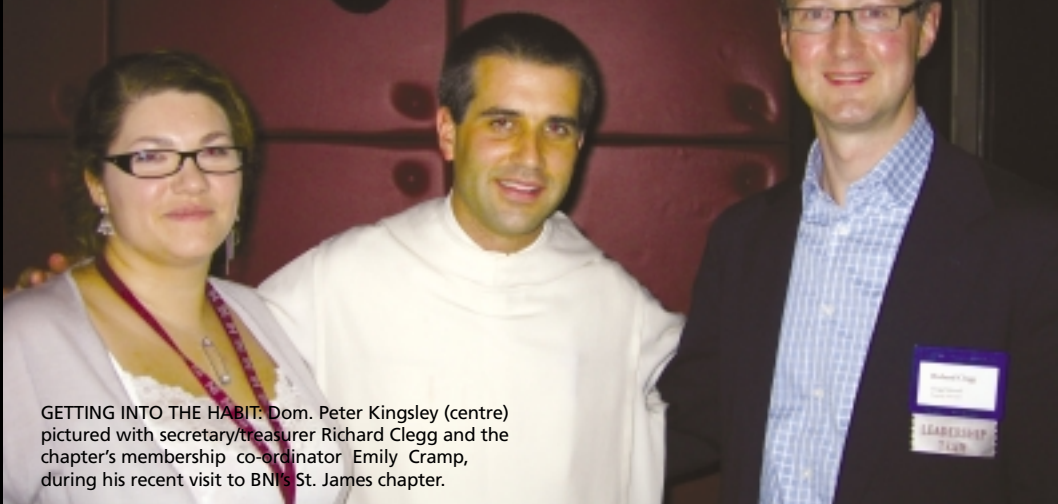
Against this backdrop, BNI Founder and Chairman, Dr Ivan Misner has just published his latest book, *"Truth or Delusion?"* which does exactly what its title suggests, cutting through the myths and misunderstandings that surround networking, showing us how to sidestep potentially damaging misconceptions and providing concise advice on how to maximise our networking efforts. We think it's likely to become required reading for every serious networker – both for experienced and longstanding BNI members, and for those still relatively new to BNI.

Using 50 key presumptions about word-of-mouth marketing – some true, others wildly inaccurate – it provides almost a step-by-step guide to success in business through referrals, with advice that can be put to immediate practical use. It also offers a valuable source of pithy topics for any chapter's education co-ordinator. Having presented each assumption – such as, 'People who like you, care and respect you, will refer business to you', or 'If you're getting all the referrals you need, you don't need to sell' – it then succinctly explains how and why the statement is true or false.

Business education and teaching is a fundamental BNI objective. Everyone knows BNI provides you with the optimum environment for doing better business, but you'll only get the best from membership by first learning how to be an expert networker – and that means separating fact from fiction. This book gives you the answers. You and your chapter can get hold of a copy through your local BNI director – and we think you'll enjoy reading it and profit from what you will learn. ●

Mark Egan

Peter turns up to fill Soho's 'Monk' category



GETTING INTO THE HABIT: Dom. Peter Kingsley (centre) pictured with secretary/treasurer Richard Clegg and the chapter's membership co-ordinator Emily Cramp, during his recent visit to BNI's St. James chapter.

No, your eyes do not deceive you. The man in the centre of our photograph IS a monk. He's pictured at a recent chapter breakfast meeting – and yes, he's wearing his habit!

Like most BNI groups, St James' Chapter in central London is still looking to fill a number of business categories, but chapter director Stephen Benjamin reckons the arrival of real-life monk, Dom. Peter Kingsley, in his Soho-based chapter scored them a UK (and possibly world) 'first'.

Peter is a monk at the Monastery of Valledara, a half hour's drive south from Rome, but he was born and raised in north London where he sang in the same church choir as St. James's secretary/treasurer Richard Clegg, and the two men remained good friends after Peter converted to Catholicism and then decided to join the monastery six years ago.

Richard said: "While Peter's life has obviously changed dramatically, it has suited his monastery for him to keep one foot firmly in the commercial world, because as a new

monastic order (formed only 35 years ago), its monks and nuns work very hard in growing organic produce that is sold in several countries around the world, including a department store on the Kings Road in Chelsea.

"He therefore makes regular sales trips back to the UK and because I knew he was keen to develop new business contacts to boost the monastery's sales, I invited him along to the chapter – much to the surprise of my colleagues."

Richard added: "After the meeting, several members exchanged business cards with Peter and expressed an interest in helping him find new outlets for the monastery's products. Unfortunately, while Peter showed great interest in BNI's business philosophy and said he would enjoy membership, Soho is a bit too far for him to travel every week." ●

Dom. Peter can be contacted at: dompeter@fraternityofjesus.org and Richard Clegg on 020 7847 5603.

Matt hails arrival of Gold Club's Magnificent Seven

While comparatively few members are elected into BNI's prestigious Gold Club (for introducing a minimum of six new members to their own chapters) – it's an even rarer sight to find someone proudly sporting not one, but two black badges on their chest!

But that's the case with electrician Matt Stenson, whose five years in BNI since becoming a founder member of Ilkeston's Two Valley's Chapter in Derbyshire, has seen him bring no fewer than 85 visitors along to his group, of whom he has now converted 12 to become enthusiastic members.

Matt said: "I guess a one-in-seven conversion rate isn't bad, so my next target is 100 visitors by which time, who knows, I might even improve my averages. I did wonder whether there was a special kind of

badge that we received for 12 new members, but I'm quite happy to wear two black badges since even one is seen as an achievement."

While Matt ponders where he might pin a third black badge, the latest 'magnificent seven' to join BNI's prestigious Gold Club are Tony Barber (from Resolute Chapter, South Wales), Rachel Cowell (Garden of England, Faversham), Paul Irvine (Premier Armouries, Leeds), Calvin Mahesh (Meridian, Chingford), Julie Muldoon (Magnum Chapter, Irvine), Paul Peek (Sunrise, Lowestoft) and Jonathan Rowden from Festival Chapter in Chichester.

Our congratulations go to everyone in BNI's growing army of black badge holders – and don't forget, if you or anyone else in your chapter gain entry to the Gold Club, tell us about it! ●

If you thought all door prizes were the same, and are seeking inspiration to improve those handed out in your chapter, then look no further than this page, where we bring you news of two rather special ways to end your meeting....

WELL, WHAT DID YOU THINK A DOOR PRIZE WAS!?

Cleaning company boss, Beata Wynczenko got a whole lot more than she bargained for when she found herself the recipient of an extremely large door prize a few weeks ago – an expensive, full-sized front door!

Beata, who runs 'Touch of Class Cleaning Services' and is a member of Middlesex's thriving Bentley Chapter in Stanmore, said: "I couldn't quite believe it when I went up to collect what I thought would be a small gift, only to find this huge new door being pulled out from behind a screen, and handed to me."

Perhaps she should have had an inkling given that the Chapter's 10-minute presenter and door prize donor that week was its door and window installation specialist, Vic Oliver, who's been known to steal the thunder at the occasional meeting with his creative and memorable initiatives.

Vic, managing director of Vogue Windows & Doors Ltd said: "Beata was a bit surprised at first, but when she realised that I was giving her the chance to have a brand new luxury door of her own choosing worth £1,000, she was very happy. I've been a BNI member for seven years and membership has

been fantastic for us, so this was a token of my appreciation to the organisation and my BNI colleagues."

In fact, the door could not have been won by a more suitable member, because Beata revealed that she was about to move house, and her new home needed a new back door, which she has subsequently chosen from Vogue's product range. "Vic's generosity has saved me a lot of money," she added. •

Vic, who is pictured presenting his 'door of the day' to Beata at the chapter meeting, can be contacted on 020 8868 4444.



Lee's highwire show must go on...

When Lee Kellett from Leeds' Moortown Chapter won a trapeze lesson from fellow member Deborah Sanderson of Urban Angels Circus, he could never have imagined how his resulting - and rather reluctant - dare-devil display would become an act of charity.

Lee has a lifelong fear of heights, and the last thing he ever wanted to win as a door prize was a two-hour lesson on a circus high wire. So much so that he tried to get out of receiving his 'prize' by offering to donate £20 to Moortown colleague Elizabeth Baxter who represents local charity, the St. Gemmas Hospice, if someone else in the chapter would take up his prize instead!

Unfortunately, Lee hadn't reckoned on his gesture being seized upon by all of his fellow BNI members who decided they would give even bigger donations to the hospice if Lee conquered his fear and accepted the lesson. They even pledged to sponsor him if he allowed them to go along and watch him take his first faltering steps along the tightrope.

When he realised that he wouldn't be allowed to wriggle out of it, Lee gritted his teeth and agreed to make the most of it, in the name of charity. He said: "Frankly I'm much happier running my stationery

business, Class Office Equipment Ltd, from terra firma. Even watching trapeze artists makes me feel ill – let alone being forced to join them, but at least I knew it was in a good cause!" In the event, Lee proved an unlikely star. "He completely threw himself into the lesson to produce a class act," said Deborah, whose circus creates prestige performances for corporate events.

With other BNI members making a suitable Spiderman costume for Lee, Chapter Director Andrea Jones got in on the act by donning tailcoat to officiate as Ring Mistress for his final performance. She said: "We raised over £650 for the hospice and everyone was amazed by Lee's strength and agility. He was a fantastic sport, especially when he hates heights and had to put up with us all watching him." •

Contact Lee on 0113 240 0228 & Deborah on 0113 262 0412.



Lee Kellett is pictured with trapeze expert Deborah Sanderson (centre) and 'ringmistress' Andrea Jones.

THANKS A BUNCH, LADIES!

They may be under-represented in many BNI chapters, but members of the fairer sex in Dublin's Viking Chapter certainly know they're not under valued, after being given a colourful surprise when they attended the group's Valentine's Day meeting.

Half way through breakfast, Chapter Director James Booth brought proceedings to a temporary halt and produced seven magnificent floral bouquets which he presented to each of his female colleagues as a personal 'thank you' for their significant contribution to the chapter's growth and success during its first eight months.

James, a mortgage broker, told SuccessNet: "BNI's female members may be in a minority, but they provide a very important added dimension both to the dynamics and business of the Viking chapter, so I decided to use Valentine's Day to pay tribute to their efforts.

"Fortunately the florist in our chapter is a man – Sam Smyth who runs Plant Life – so he created some fabulous bouquets and we were able to keep it a complete secret from the ladies until the very last moment. The resulting smiles on our ladies' faces made the rest of the meeting even better than usual," James added. He is pictured (below left) with Sam Smyth and Viking's females. •



'Geordie' Jim turns unlikely Radio 1 star

BNI Geordie printer James Ogden found himself a star guest on Radio 1's Edith Bowman Show last month – when the programme became a fly-on-the-wall of his Wallsend company, Stonebrook Design & Print Services, for a whole week!

BBC's 'Lunchtime Link-Up' lets its audience shape and influence lunchtime broadcasting, by selecting an office, sixth form centre or even a listener's own living room, and then 'invading it' for five consecutive days throughout the show.

During his live chats with DJ Edith, James found himself discussing a host of topical news events and current issues, and choosing some of the show's music, but on the final day he was determined to get in a plug for BNI, enthusing about the business benefits of belonging to the Turner Chapter in nearby Morpeth.

After his week of celebrity, he told SuccessNet:

"It was good fun and quite a few BNI members and other business colleagues tuned in to listen." •

Contact James on 0191 263 3302.



WHAT A LOT I'VE GOT: Mayo mobile phone specialist Brendan Chambers sorts through just a small selection of old mobiles that have been handed in at his shops, to help raise €1M for local charities.

Brendan's €1M phone call to all Irish chapters

One of Ireland's major mobile phone resellers has launched what is quite probably BNI's biggest-ever charity fund-raising appeal, by calling on all of his country's 37 chapters to help raise a staggering €1 million for deserving local causes.

Brendan Chambers, whose Mayo-based company C&C Cellular sells up to 1,000 new mobiles a month, has already single-handedly netted nearly €30,000 for four charities in his own area after last year launching the company's "Dispose and Donate" programme, initially aiming to raise just €1,000 for each organisation.

Realising this modest target would quickly be overtaken, Brendan (a member of Mayo Chapter) promoted a gala ball last autumn attended by 250 business people who added another €11,500 to the €17,500 produced by C&C's own customers in handing back their old mobiles for recycling.

Brendan said: "There are many recycling schemes which see mobiles collected in the name of charity but when we looked into them, we found the charities only received a fraction of what the phones were worth. We located a company in China that offers the best prices for old and damaged mobiles.

They remove all the parts, test them and re-use the undamaged components to make reconditioned phones for developing countries. This is true recycling and it meant we could raise up to €10 per handset for charity."

Boosted by this success, Brendan launched his €1M appeal at BNI's regional members' day in Limerick, when he told BNI colleagues: "The €30,000 we raised last year represents only 7% of the phones sold by us in Mayo alone, so if every one of BNI's Irish chapters collects just 2,000 old mobiles to raise funds for local charities of their choice, I'm convinced we will pass the €1 million target.

"All phones collected by each chapter will be converted into cash for their own deserving causes, and they will receive cheques to present to their charities. It's a great way of heightening the organisation's own profile in the Irish business community, by showing its charitable nature." •

For information about how your chapter can join the 'Dispose and Donate' appeal, contact Brendan Chambers on +353 (0)98-25481 or by email at: brendan.chambers@candccellular.com

HULL CENTRAL PUT BEST (DRESSED) FEET FORWARD

While many of his contemporaries content themselves with a few GCSEs and the prospect of a back-packing trip around Europe, Hull Central Chapter's newest and youngest recruit Sean Scott knows exactly where he's going – on a journey he hopes will see him emulate the success of his mentor, Sir Richard Branson.

At the age of just 18, Sean has his sights firmly set on reaching the pinnacle of business, to which end he's already captured a string of heavyweight awards from captains of British industry in recognition of his rare talent for spotting business opportunities.

His latest venture is a novel web-based retail business called 'sockson', launched just four months ago but already its single product – mens' black socks with distinctive green flashing to the toe, heel and ankle band – is selling like hot cakes and set to become a must-have icon of male clothing.

"It's based on the well-known fact that most men buy a variety of different-coloured socks in different styles over the course of a year but often still can't find a matching pair when they need them," said Sean. "By subscribing to my online sock service, they receive a delivery of new socks every

three months or so, all of them identical and therefore inter-changeable. So far this year, I've signed up 2,000 customers."

At the same time he launched 'sockson', Sean decided to join Hull Central, instantly putting himself in contention to be our youngest UK member, and his bold approach to business, complete with quirky website – www.sockson.co.uk – has created an ideal 'fit' with a BNI group already boasting more than its fair share of top performers.

A winner of the UK Young Enterprise Scheme (and runner-up in Europe), Sean has taken a host of other titles including Ernst & Young's 'Next Generation Entrepreneur of the Year' and management awards from the Institute of Directors, Chartered Management Institute and Chartered Institute of Management Accountants.

He said: "I knew that even with an original business idea, our early success would depend more on word-of-mouth marketing and referrals, so joining BNI was the obvious choice. Not only have a number of my chapter colleagues signed up for a sock subscription and found me other customers, but through them I've been able to source all the key services we needed." ●

Contact Sean on 07958 492797



SOCKING IT TO US: 'Sockson' Entrepreneur Sean Scott (centre) pictured with other Hull Central members modelling his subscription sock. (From L to R): Dean Paterson, Tony Smith, Vic Golding, Sean Scott, Dave Ettridge, Paul Pulford, David Horswill and John Gilleard. (Photo taken by Hull Central's award-winning professional photographer Bill Ballam).

Surtees spawns its own newest member

Newcastle upon Tyne's buoyant Surtees Chapter has given birth to its own newest recruit, after three of its members teamed up to create a brand new company utilising their diverse business talents.

MOSO Ltd was launched a few weeks ago to provide comprehensive tracking and security services for company vehicles, assets and personnel using the latest technology. It's the brainchild of Surtees' telecommunications expert Malcolm Kyle, and brings him together with the chapter's lawyer George Parker-Fuller (from TMJ Legal Services) and marketing specialist/designer Justin Turner of Carrot Media Ltd.

Now MOSO's managing director, Malcolm said: "I'd long wanted my own business but, although I had plenty of experience in the vehicle tracking industry, I knew I'd need partners with other skills to develop the company. I'd got to know George and Justin through my chapter and felt they offered the mix of expertise I needed. When I discussed my ideas

with them, they shared my enthusiasm and the whole thing took off at great speed."

Justin quickly created a corporate identity, website and stationery before developing an e-marketing and communication strategy for the company's move into new markets, and MOSO soon found itself winning a competitive pitch for a major client – clinched after George demonstrated his knowledge of complex legal aspects involving their first contract.

Malcolm added: "We've got an unusual blend of business, public and commercial experience and we can make a significant impact in this emerging market, initially here in the UK and then across mainland Europe, especially with the fantastic network of BNI colleagues to help us drive the business forward." ●

Contact Malcolm on 07710 909595 or visit: www.moso.ltd.uk

NEWS IN BRIEF

IT'S A 'GEM' OF A READ

SuccessNet has another rival for the attention of BNI readers in Milton Keynes, following the launch of a bi-monthly newsletter specifically for members of the town's four chapters.

Called 'Gemstones' – reflecting the names of the four groups, Diamond, Amethyst, Ruby and Sapphire – the four-page newsletter is the creation of Diamond member, freelance writer Judi Whiting who researches the material, writes and distributes the publication to more than 100 BNI members in the area. She said: "Contributions come from members and the rest I make up myself, using BNI news and events, and reflecting on topical issues of the day. It seems to be quite popular." ●

Contact Judi on 0845 22 62 998 or visit her website at: www.amoreden.co.uk

PUT ON YOUR RUNNING SHOES!

Calling all BNI runners in south-west London: get ready to don track suit and trainers to take part in an inter-chapter fund-raising event for the National Benevolent Fund for the Aged.

The annual five kilometre fun run takes place in Bushy Park (near Hampton Court) on Sunday morning, 10th June, and it's being organised by Twickenham's Business Class Chapter printer David Wimblett who said: "It's open to all – young and older, fast and slow. You can even walk around the course, as long as you're helping to raise money."

Last year, members of Business Class rashly threw down the gauntlet and challenged colleagues in neighbouring Tudor Chapter to enter, even supplying a trophy for the winning team. "Sadly Tudor won, but we will get our revenge this year!" David added. "But I'm hoping to persuade more members from other south-west London chapters to take part as well. Chapters can enter any number of members in their team as long as there is a minimum of four people." ●

For further information, contact David on 07836 378170, or visit: www.nbfa.org.uk

LANDMARKS APLENTY AS REFERRALS - AND MONEY- FLOW IN



With most chapters having adopted the 'Show me the Money' box system for accurately measuring the value of referrals, and many more enjoying their sixth, seventh, or even longer anniversary, it's little wonder that SuccessNet's office is hearing about more and more landmark events being celebrated by chapters - whether to mark the monetary value of business passed, or simply high numbers of referrals. On these two pages, we feature just a few of those with something to shout about....

It's a Hat(field)ful of referrals!

They may still be a young BNI group, but members of Verulam Chapter in Hatfield have been passing a hatful of referrals - in fact more than 8,000 of them!

To mark his passing of the landmark 8,000th referral, electrician Peter Holgate

found himself collecting a special bottle of 'refreshment' from Chapter Director Bruce Nash who said: "It was pure co-incidence that Peter's was the milestone referral, but in truth the recognition couldn't have gone to a more pro-active member of our team. We've had a fantastic start and although this was a special occasion, it simply reflects the bullish and buoyant mood of the whole chapter." •

Peter is pictured with his 'prize', flanked by chapter director Bruce Nash (left) and BNI's regional director Charlie Kenny.



Double celebration for Two Valleys

Members of the Two Valleys Chapter in Ilkeston, South Derbyshire had double cause for celebration last month, when they not only passed their 8,000th referral, but also paid tribute to one of their colleagues for introducing no fewer than a dozen new members to BNI.

While the milestone referral was passed by one of Two Valley's newer members, hypnotherapist Claire Cross, the second landmark involved founder member, accountant Matt Stenson who has introduced a host of visitors to the chapter during its five year existence. (See story p2)

He said: "I've also managed to pass 543 referrals since we launched - a figure only beaten by another original member, Rob Murdy, who is just four ahead of me at the moment. But he's introduced less visitors and new members than me, so I guess you could say we're about equal. We're great friends but maintain a healthy rivalry in our chapter, and that's good for everyone's business."

Chapter Director Dean Richards added: "We made it our key goal to attract more visitors, believing that once we'd grown the chapter, everything else would fall into place, and that is now happening - with average referrals rising from just over 100 a month last autumn, to a healthy 170 now." •

Dubliners share over €1M

Members of Dublin's Grosvenor Chapter recently celebrated their passing of more than €1 million worth of referrals since they started using the 'Show me the Money' system two years ago,

Despite its modest size - hovering around the 20-member mark - Grosvenor has shown remarkably consistent form since its launch three years ago, but it has only been since

April 2005 when members began registering the actual value of referrals in the 'Show me the Money' box each week, that they realised just how much business the chapter was notching up.

Membership Co-ordinator Stephen Brown - no stranger to figures through his work as an accountant with Hayden Brown in Dublin's famous Grafton Street - commented: "We're all justifiably proud of passing this referrals landmark. It will undoubtedly spur us on to achieve the next €1m worth of business even faster, especially since we're pushing hard to increase our membership this year." •

Contact Stephen on +353 (0)1-6771951.



BIG FIGURES: Members of Dublin's Grosvenor Chapter proudly spell the value of their referrals.

Bentley goes big on £1M



Bentley members are pictured in buoyant mood with a giant 'cheque' made specially for the occasion by chapter colleague Richard Green. Photo by chapter photographer Andrew Butler.

One of the first chapters to embrace BNI's 'Show me the Money Box' method of accurately assessing the total value of referrals passed across the breakfast table, has celebrated its £1 million milestone – less than a year after adopting the system.

Stanmore's Bentley Chapter which has won BNI's prestigious Founder's Award three times, and is one of the largest in north-West London with 40 members, started to use 'Show me the Money' 12 months ago, passing the £1m-mark at the end of month 11. During that time, the total value of the group's referrals has averaged more than £90,000 a month!

Retiring Chapter Director Andrew Rhodes said: "You'd expect Bentley to be one of this country's top performing chapters because we've consistently maintained a large and energetic membership, but it wasn't until we adopted the money box system of measuring the value of business actually gained by members, that we realised just how much business is passed between us.

"If we'd used the same evaluation method since the chapter was started nine years ago, I think we could have been looking at a total referral value almost into eight figures. It certainly makes every member sit up and think about the considerable worth of his or her seat at the breakfast table, and it confirms independent studies carried out elsewhere in the UK which indicate that the average value of BNI referrals to an individual member is between £25,000 and £30,000 a year."

Nigel Lack, Membership Co-ordinator added: "To have recorded £1million in goods and services invoiced by just those chapter members who chose to participate over the first 12 months of our using the 'Show me the Money' programme is a fantastic achievement. Not only that, but I can confirm that this figure comes from many, many smaller invoices and not just a few large ones, showing how givers really do gain". ●

Contact Andrew Rhodes on 020 8866 2151.

...But Chingford hits its target even faster

Meanwhile, anything their Bentley colleagues can do, Essex members can do faster – having celebrated their achieving £500,000 worth of new business for each other well under a year after their chapter's launch.

The Chingford-based Meridian Chapter which meets at the Royal Epping Forest Golf Club may not be the biggest but, as Membership Co-ordinator Tony Sobers said: "Half a million between eighteen of us... you do the maths. It's most definitely been a good year for all of us."

Chiropodist Paul Tingey is just one of Meridian's satisfied founders: He said: "After just a few weeks I was referred to a local clinic, and before I knew it I had referrals to three more, bringing me more than 100 new patients! Without BNI it would have taken me a very long time to find that many clients."

Removals company boss Paul McGrath added: "I had been looking for more business but I was getting fed up with dodgy leads, indecisive clients and unreliable payers when I heard about the new BNI chapter in Chingford. It was very interesting and seemed to offer a solution. I went along as a visitor and found it was exactly what I needed. The rest is history, and I won't be giving up my seat at the breakfast table in a hurry."

"Reaching a landmark like half a million pounds worth of business puts it all into context for members," said retiring chapter director Paul Taylor. "It's a real achievement and gives everyone encouragement when we can measure our progress in pounds and pence. Now our priority is increasing the size of the chapter so that we reach the £1 million mark even faster." ●

Contact Tony Sobers on 020 8144 3968 or by email at: tony.sobers@themediapractice.co.uk

B4B soar past million mark

They're nowhere near Essex's largest chapter, but when it comes to doing big business, few can hit harder than members of aptly-named Business for Business (B4B) Chapter which meets in the Jack Carter cricket pavilion in Redbridge.

B4B introduced the 'Show me the Money' Box exactly 12 months ago, since when members have referred a staggering £1,250,000 worth of business between each other – nearly £800,000 of it transacted in the past six months!

Membership Co-ordinator Myron Lipson – appropriately the chapter's accountant – said: "What we lack in numbers, we certainly make up for by being a close, enthusiastic and mutually very supportive group. One of our newest female members said our bubbly, energetic nature was a key reason for her joining us."

Secretary/Treasurer Geoff Wolf added: "Our business performance has been boosted by some very substantial referrals in recent weeks, but the good thing is that the monetary value of our referrals is pretty evenly shared by all members. We might only pass 20 or so at each meeting, but they are solid business opportunities. However, the best thing about our passing the 'Show me the Money' box around the table each week, is the impact it has on our visitors, who get an immediate and always very positive insight into the value of a seat at our breakfast table." ●

By George, we've passed 5,000!

Members of Nuneaton's George Eliot Chapter recently celebrated the passing of their 5,000th referral – an event that even roused local press representatives to get out of their beds much earlier than usual and go along to the breakfast meeting to find out what it was all about.

It took just over three years for the chapter to reach this figure – netting well over £500,000 worth of new business – but Membership Coordinator Rob Howard says that with their numbers now consistently in the mid-thirties who between them pass an average of nearly 50 referrals a week, they'll double the figure to 10,000 in two years time.

Our picture, taken by the chapter's photographer Robert Kershaw, shows Kate

Chorley, from local solicitors Cocks Lloyd (one of the group's founder members) passing the milestone referral to outgoing Chapter Director Martin Harris, a partner with financial advisors, Hewitt and Harris, flanked by their George Eliot colleagues.

Rob, a management consultant added: "It's great to reach such a milestone, but we're looking to build on this by attracting more members. In the early days our numbers were measured in the teens, but our aim is to hit 40 this year, and stay there. We've still got plenty of vacant categories we'd like to fill." ●

Contact Rob on 024 7664 1261 or 07787 195 861.



WINNING IN WALES

As BNI continues to expand throughout Wales, SuccessNet has been talking to some of our most entrepreneurial Welsh members – all of them female - who have good reason to be glad they joined their local chapters. Here we highlight three of their success stories....



'PRECIOUS HOURS' SOLUTION FOR OVERWORKED AIMEE

During her early career as a recruitment consultant in Cardiff, Aimee Bateman's one complaint was that by the time she got home after work, she never had enough time to do the things she wanted in her personal and domestic life.

So, after some careful thought and discussion with friends, she gave up her job and launched her own enterprising concierge business, providing a limitless range of lifestyle management services to busy professionals in South Wales who, like her, were too busy working to deal with many of their everyday chores and personal arrangements.

Less than a year later, while the (temporarily) bad news for Aimee is that she is now busier than ever, the good news is that her innovative company, appropriately called 'Precious Hours' is in huge demand and rapidly becoming a household name around the Welsh capital, so much so that in barely 12 months, the business has already surpassed its Year Two financial targets – thanks largely to Aimee's decision to join Cardiff's Intrepid Chapter last summer.

"Offering concierge services is still a new concept in the UK so I knew there was no

point in advertising. I had to educate people and that meant word-of-mouth networking and marketing," she said. "I looked at various networking organisations but BNI stood head and shoulders above the rest, so I joined last June and it has been a truly amazing experience."

"When I launched the company it was just me, but today there are five of us and I will soon need more staff to meet the increasing demand. Most of this is due to BNI, because over 80% of all my first year's business has come out of referrals from my chapter colleagues," Aimee added.

Precious Hours sells time to its clients who range from cash-rich, time-poor professionals to busy working mums, and Aimee describes her lifestyle management services as providing people with a PA for their life, in the same way that high-powered executives need a PA in their office. "We carry out the time-consuming and often menial tasks they struggle to deal with, giving them a few extra precious hours every week to enjoy their families, friends and have a social life."

No two days are the same for Aimee and her team. When SuccessNet caught up with

her, she's just finished the day's 'to do' list for a client which included taking shoes to the cobbler, finding a good plumber, mending a broken zip, taking a car to be serviced and, wait for it, buying a pair of goldfish for a birthday present, with the specific instruction that they had to look Australian. "I didn't know what an Aussie goldfish looked like, so I found a healthy pair in a pet shop, said they were called Bruce and Sheila, and everyone was happy...." she added.

Having to be a jack-of-all-trades and find rapid yet sound solutions to an infinite variety of client requests, is the other reason why BNI represents the perfect business companion for Aimee. "Where else could I instantly tap in to a vast range of skills, knowledge and expertise, or be able to sub-contract services to such a diverse pool of reliable, capable professionals and tradespeople," she asked. "It is so reassuring for us to know that if we don't have the immediate answers, we know a BNI man (or woman) who can help. BNI is a brilliant lifesaver for a business like ours." •

Contact Aimee on 0845 094 2240 or visit: www.precioushours.co.uk

SINCE WHEN DID ACCOUNTANTS SOUND (OR LOOK) LIKE THIS?

Gosh, they can't be? Surely not? Accountants who are not only young, bubbly and attractive to boot, but also have a great sense of humour? Tell us more, we hear you say.

As one of the newest accountancy outfits in Cardiff, the 'brains' behind Mazuma Money were determined to make their new venture as different as possible from what they perceived as the stereotype image of their profession – middle-aged men in grey suits usually bringing bad news to their clients...

And after just 12 months, 24-year-olds Sophie Hughes (pictured seated left on the sofa) and Lucy Cohen appear to be succeeding rather nicely, thanks in no small measure to their decision to join BNI chapters soon after launching their practice. "BNI has been wonderful for us," said Sophie, who appropriately became Secretary/Treasurer of the city's 35-strong Intrepid Chapter this month.

"Since I joined Intrepid last autumn, nearly half of all our new clients have come via BNI referrals so our practice has grown faster than we dared hope it would. When we heard about the formation of the city's new Defiant Chapter, Lucy was determined not to miss out so she signed up as a core group member and has been chosen as the group's first chapter director," she added.

"As a new business in a very competitive

profession, it was obvious we had to network extensively, and quite apart from the business it has brought us, BNI has been the ideal vehicle for forging new contacts not only in the immediate area but also further afield. Already we have clients in Bristol, Yorkshire and Scotland and, because of the way we do business, it doesn't really matter where we're based in relation to our clients."

While Sophie and Lucy always like to meet the faces behind their new company clients – mainly SMEs and self-employed ventures – they pride themselves on bringing a fresh approach to accountancy. "Our priority is to remove the stress that so many smaller businesses have when it comes to doing their accounts or even meeting their accountants," said Sophie. "We keep everything very simple, we never bamboozle people with jargon and, from the unusual look of our website to our discussions with clients, we always present a bright and cheerful appearance."

"When people meet us for the first time and ask what we do, they're always

surprised – sometimes even shocked – when we tell them, but that's a good thing, because we'd hate to be seen as the stereotypical accountants. If we manage to change that image, even in a small way, we'll be very pleased. Meanwhile, it's nice that people feel we're breaking the mould."

Why 'Mazuma'? "It's Yiddish slang meaning 'money' and just had a nice ring to it," said Lucy. ●

Contact Lucy or Sophie on 0845 3105654, or find out why they're not your typical accountants, by visiting their eye-catching purple website at: www.mazumamoney.co.uk



DEBORAH PROVES YOU CAN MIX BUSINESS AND BABIES

Sitting at home after giving birth to her first child, executive PA Deborah Meredith looked at her new-born son and wondered if she really wanted to return to working long hours in a high-powered job. In the event she did briefly go back, but the need for flexible working hours soon clashed with her boss's demand to remain her top priority and they parted. It was to prove a blessing in disguise!

"I was determined not to be an absent mother, but at the same time I knew I'd miss the buzz and daily challenges of a busy work environment, so I decided to offer my services as a freelance PA, hoping to find enough work to pay the bills and still give me time to

spend with my son," Deborah recalled.

And so it might have been, had she not found herself a few days later, sitting next to a BNI member at a marketing seminar, discussing how she could best balance motherhood with her desire to work. The rest, as they say, is history – because only 18 months later Deborah now heads up Cardiff's fastest growing and best-known 'Virtual PA' company, providing comprehensive PA and secretarial services to scores of clients.

She'd launched 'City PA' as a one-woman business in September 2005, working out of the spare room in her home but, after accepting an invitation to visit and then join BNI's Bevan Chapter in nearby Bridgend, any

thoughts Deborah may have had about staying small, simply evaporated.

"Thanks to BNI, the business just took off," she said. "I'd aimed to get five or six small clients and look after their needs from home, but suddenly I was getting lots of referrals for new business, not just to work with clients in South Wales but further afield in London, Chester and

Nottingham. Within three months I had to persuade my husband Kevin to give up his job and join me full-time, and three months later City PA had grown to five people.

"It's only 18 months since I launched the business but I've already passed the financial targets I'd set myself to reach after five years. The next stage will be either to franchise City PA, or open satellite offices in other major conurbations – but first we intend to consolidate in Cardiff by becoming the best in our sector," she added.

Deborah, who is Bevan's immediate past Chapter Director, makes no secret of the fact that 85% of all her current business has come in through BNI referrals, either from her own chapter colleagues or those in Cardiff's Enterprise Chapter (where Kevin is a member) and the neighbouring Bute group, to which one of her account managers, Ceri-Anne Brennan, belongs.

She added: "BNI has made an incredible difference to my life and it will continue to play a key role in our further expansion, because as new members join our team, they will also be asked to join other BNI chapters. While I've got enough entrepreneurial spirit to have made a success of this on my own, there's no doubt that it would have taken far longer without BNI." Deborah is pictured next to husband Kevin, alongside other team members. ●

Contact Deborah on 0845 087 3281



BIG BREAKFASTS

- EVEN BIGGER RESULTS

Fancy a nice quiet breakfast? Then don't come near BNI, whose members are still adding up the value of all the new business generated at the recent series of regional 'Big Breakfast' events.

Throughout the UK and Ireland, and across mainland Europe, many thousands of members joined regional gatherings to mark the first-ever International Networking Week and, while London's North-West area hosted the single biggest breakfast - nearly 600 members and guests packing Harrow Leisure Centre - several others saw huge attendances, with turnouts representing up to 90% of the local BNI membership.

Former Ipswich member Rob Dunger (now one of Radio Suffolk's most popular presenters), perfectly summed up his region's breakfast: "WOW What a show - very impressive, slick and professional!"

Making new contacts and developing new business opportunities was the name of the game, and few participants did it better than Elaine Mather, an executive with Abbey plc and member of Norwich's Norman Chapter who forged links with 70 new people, receiving 38 positive follow-ups and closing six new deals on the day.

Meanwhile, at Central London's big breakfast, the Lords Cricket Ground venue proved an impressive winner with many members and guests staying on for two hours after breakfast to network, and take tours of the famous sporting arena. Executive Director Laura Hurren remarked: "We received more positive feedback from this event than any other we've staged. It was brilliant."

On Tyneside, more than 150 members packed into Newcastle's Novotel for what was described by regional executive director Lynley Robb as "the most fantastic meeting BNI has ever held in the North-East. A huge amount of networking and a lot of new business took place. We just can't wait for next year's event to come around." ●

Members and guests at East Anglia's big breakfast enjoyed some unusual presentations - none more so than watching Norwich Castle's Peter Knowles being 'guillotined' by fellow chapter member, magician Sean Goodman.



EVERY ONE A WINNER! Members of Edgwarebury Chapter, Bushey, came to their Big Breakfast wearing some very creative hats representing their trades and professions around the breakfast table.



The name of the game: NW London members used every opportunity they got to network with newfound business colleagues - producing a host of new contacts.



Is that sunshine overhead - or have we all turned up at Harrow Leisure Centre are bathed in a big breakfast.



Nice prop! Chiswick Hogarth Chapter's specialist car sourcing supplier Ashley Winston delivered his presentation standing in the drivers seat of this splendid sports car.



Photos for our Big Breakfast special courtesy of Gary Batchelor (Concord Chapter, Rickmansworth), Colin Shaw (Orwell Chapter, Ipswich), Jan & Kevin Weatherly (George Chapter, Washington) and Simon McEachran (Trailblazers Chapter, Glasgow).

FIVE OUT OF SIX AIN'T BAD!

When Northumberland solicitor Peter Millican was chosen by members of his own Turner Chapter to be one of their three 60-second presenters at the North-East's Big Breakfast meeting, he never imagined it would lead to him picking up five new clients, with the possibility of a sixth!

With over 150 people attending the event, Peter was determined to make a big impression on such a large audience, to support his plans for expanding his one-man legal practice later this year.

He obviously succeeded, because after his 60-second infomercial, he was approached by six businesses, five of whom became clients within the month, and the sixth is expected to follow soon. The Ashington-based lawyer added: "I'm very grateful to my colleagues for choosing me to be one of the speakers, and the results have been excellent. Referrals from my chapter already account for a phenomenal 40% of my turnover, so BNI has been largely responsible for growing my practice."

A specialist in all aspects of business law, Peter added: "I joined BNI because I needed to expand my contacts to attract more word-of-mouth referrals, and it has proved hugely beneficial – so much so that I wish I had four other members of staff to place in other chapters. I'm aiming to take on a second solicitor, so this was a great chance to forge new business contacts." ●

Contact Peter on 01670 528450.

SITTING COMFORTABLY: Solicitor Peter Millican found his Big Breakfast very rewarding.



Everyone's a winner! East Anglia's star performers proudly show off their outstanding achievement awards in Norwich FC's Carrow Road executive suite.



ed to gold? Part of the vast amber light during their



Winner of TV's 'The Apprentice', Michelle Dewberry, was one of several guest speakers at the Lords' big breakfast.



Collecting the silverware! Craig Walter (left), Chapter Director of the Trailblazers Chapter which received the cup for being Scotland West Region's best performing chapter from BNI Director Charlie Robertson.



NINE OF THE BEST: These high performers from North East chapters received their notable networker certificates at the Newcastle big breakfast.





train&gain

MY NAME'S NOT KEN...

Says
Kevin Horlock,
Area Director
for London
South East.



Many years ago, in 1888, a young lad was born to a poor farmer in Missouri. In his teens he got up at 4am every day to milk his parents' cows, yet he still managed to get educated at the State Teacher's College. His first job was selling correspondence courses to ranchers; then he moved on to selling bacon, soap and lard. Hardly the start in life to suggest he would go on to write one of the world's best selling books!

His name was Dale Carnegie and he understood people. For £5 or so, we can buy a copy of that slim book which will repay your investment a thousand fold, because it has the power to generate massive returns on our investment in BNI.

Think ahead to the visitors who are about to come to your chapter? Have you ever wondered why some visitors queue to join a chapter, while others are never seen again? People buy from people - and BNI is a people business, so it pays us to become genuinely interested in other people.

When we are with our chapter members and especially visitors, are we really interested in what they have to say and do we show it? Do we get to know them? Do we introduce

them to our colleagues in their power circle who could pass them business?

Do you remember your first BNI meeting as a visitor? Were the members happy to see you and did they welcome you with a smile? Visitors are often nervous when they arrive: they don't quite know what to expect. We can put them at ease with a handshake, a 'hello' and one simple smile.

Do we look at their badges and use their names? That quickly builds rapport: a person's name is to them, the sweetest and most important sound in any language. How do we feel when someone gets our name wrong? How does Becky feel when she's called Barbie, or Kevin when he's called Ken?

And can we claim to be a good listener? Do we encourage guests to talk about themselves and their business? We can speak about our own business later, but if we concentrate on the other person's interests, then we start to build a strong relationship. Remember the Kipling verse:

*I keep six honest serving-men.
(They taught me all I knew);
Their names are What and Why and When
And How and Where and Who.*

And you know what makes some people such good company? They can make the other person feel important: and, even more pertinently, they do it sincerely. We warm to them: we want to talk to them and think they are the most interesting people - because they make us feel important.

John D Rockefeller was the world's first billionaire. He knew a bit about people and understood instinctively what Carnegie would later write. Rockefeller said: "The ability to deal with people is as purchasable a commodity as sugar or coffee and I will pay more for that ability than for any other under the sun."

Carnegie encouraged us to "Learn to love, respect and enjoy other people." And that's the golden key to making our chapter welcoming and friendly - and one that visitors will want to join.

And the book? 'How to Win Friends and Influence People': a pittance at the till: a fortune between the covers. If you haven't already done so, read it! ●

Kevin Horlock can be contacted on 020 7870 7541 or at kevin@londonbni.net

Trevelyan launch with a baby and a bride!

How much excitement can a chapter launch generate? In the case of Newcastle upon Tyne's latest BNI group, quite a lot!

Barely 48 hours after the birth of the city's Trevelyan chapter last month, core group member Lisa Steanson who runs a plumbing business, delivered an even more important newcomer, her second child - a baby girl called Paige - while just a few days later, another

founder, Jacqui Fulton of Travelcare Travel Agents forged her second new partnership of the month by marrying fiancé, Dean Rowell, a police officer with Northumbria Constabulary.

Trevelyan's first Chapter Director, Phil Walker joked: "We knew Lisa was due to give birth at any time and I was just hoping the excitement of our big launch event wouldn't prove too much and send her into labour. These two happy events gave us the best possible start."

Other recently launched chapters in the UK are: Aldershot (Hampshire), Ashford 2 (Kent), Morning Glory (Norwich), Waveney Valley (Beccles, Norwich), Congleton (Cheshire), Harbour (Wareham, Dorset), Heart

of Surrey (Dorking), Jaguar (Liverpool), Melton Mowbray, Palace (Kensington, London), Romsey (Hampshire), West Malling (Kent) and Westwood (Leek, Staffordshire).

Meanwhile, across the North Sea, our latest chapters in Germany are: Ahorn (Krefeld, Dusseldorf), Augustus (Augsburg), Conrad Röntgen (Giessen-Fulda), Henlein (Nuremberg), Mars (Stuttgart), Peridot (Rosenheim-Traunstein), Schwinge (Bremen) and Uralit (Rosenheim-Traunstein), while in the Netherlands, The Pelikaan Chapter was launched at Alphen a.d. Rijn in The Hague. Finally, Austria has two new groups with the launch of Wiesel and Zorro chapters, both in Brunn, Niederoesterreich. ●

Breakfast is the new lunch!

Says Laura Hurren, Executive Director for Central London & Birmingham



The car industry will have you believe that black is the new silver, the beauty industry says that 40 is the new 30 and in networking terms, breakfast is definitely the new power lunch!

Fanciful? Maybe? Certainly it was not the way we did business in the UK back in the 'nineties, but 10 years on it's quite a different story with breakfast meetings now the new power meal of the day and BNI leading the way.

As I celebrate my tenth birthday as a Director with BNI this month, my passion for the whole concept of this exceptional organisation is infinitely greater than it was at the start. Having attended three or four breakfast meetings a week for the past 10 years, counting a few weeks off for good behaviour, I've probably consumed at least 2,000 BNI breakfasts and witnessed good, bad and ugly meetings, all in the name of networking. What have I learned? Well, it's an even playing field and in order to make it work for you, let me share a few of the essential ingredients.

It all starts with desire: in other words you've got to want it! You'll have heard it said that BNI really stands for Batteries Not Included and believe it or not it's true. You will get out of your membership what you put into it. Be prepared to roll up your sleeves and get involved. The best thing you can do is to diarise an extra hour each week to work on your membership. That could be filled by focusing on the role you hold in the chapter, on finding referrals for others, on your 60 second presentation or for 1-2-1s.

This is the way to build your membership into something worthwhile. When I first looked at the organisation, I met someone in North America who told me that 80% of their new business came from their BNI membership, so it gladdens my heart to hear members in the UK quoting similar statistics now. BNI works - but it starts with the desire to make it happen.

All excuses are equal: I wholeheartedly believe in this statement and, if you invite guests to your chapter on a regular basis you'll have heard all of the best excuses as to why it is impossible for them to attend. I know how disheartening this can be. Only the other day I heard the excuse that early mornings 'interfere with my bio-rhythms.' You may laugh but you are going to hear them all. My advice is that when you invite a visitor, saying as little as necessary about what to expect, is often far more persuasive. That way, if they don't join, the whole chapter takes the rejection - not you.

Giver's Gain: When I first heard this I thought it sounded a little too idealistic, but the last 10 years have taught me that to become a master networker you must embrace the Giver's Gain philosophy. Whether meeting an old friend or a new contact, the master networker's first thought is: 'What can I do to help?' It's more than a strategy, it's a way of life.

Constant development: If Giver's Gain is a way of life, then constant development is the law of life. Imagine if you had stood still when you bought your first computer or mobile phone. You would be out of the game by now. The same is true in any field and networking is no different. If you don't do anything else today, please book yourself onto the next BNI skills training workshop being held somewhere in your locality. If you learn just one new thing it will be worth your while.

Commitment: One definition of commitment is doing what you said you would do, long after the mood in which you said it has left you. Every successful person I know is committed to their particular field of endeavour and, being successful in BNI demands a commitment way beyond turning up each week. For me, commitment is the number one fundamental of success in business, life and most definitely BNI.

Nowadays, I think I still prefer lunch but I am also addicted to breakfast! Long may it last. ●

Blue sky thinking leads to.... Blue Skies!

Life is fast becoming blue skies and sunshine for Nottingham entrepreneur Sean Milner, after BNI helped him change careers and launch his own fast-growing business.

Sean, newly retired chapter director of J25 Chapter in Risley, Derbyshire, had joined BNI as a franchised distributor for a network marketing company, but then two things happened to change his life for the better.

"After an enjoyable army career, I wanted to spend more time with my young family so I thought working from home would be the answer. But with help from BNI members, I quickly built my franchise to a point where I was working every day and most evenings, seeing even less of the family than before. Something had to change," said Sean.

Enter his former army chums. "I'd stayed in touch with many of them and they wanted to know how I'd made my distribution business so successful, asking for advice on how to get them started in civvy street. That gave me the idea for moving into personal development and training."

Enter his new BNI colleagues. "The more I thought about it, the more it appealed to offer training not just to my former army colleagues, but also to my fast-expanding network of distributors and corporate organisations. And within my chapter I had all the resources to make it happen," Sean added.

Sean's blue sky thinking soon paid handsome dividends. By the end of 2005, he'd enlisted the services of J25's website developer, graphic designer and IT specialist to create his new business - 'Blue Skies: Capture Your Potential' - offering online and in-house learning and training programmes. Little more than 12 months later, and with the additional expertise of the chapter's marketing expert, copywriter, photographer, printer and IFA, Sean was on target to reach 10,000 online members.

He said: "The past year has seen amazing growth - so much so that I'm soon moving out of my log cabin 'office' at the bottom of the garden, and into proper purpose-built offices." Sean is pictured below (centre) with some of the J25 colleagues who helped build his business. ●

Call Sean on 0115 972 4219 or visit his website at: www.cypsucccess.com/business



Gold Cup members told: You've been framed!

Members of Cheltenham's Gold Cup Chapter were recently treated to a unique 10-minute presentation – and found themselves playing the starring roles in a valuable promotional video.

Given such a great opportunity to tell his Gold Cup colleagues about his business, Video Interactive, local film maker Terry Anderson decided the best way was to produce an entire 'live' video of the chapter in action - including introduction, interviews with members and a closing message - all within his ten minute slot!

Terry said: "We didn't pre-warn anyone, because we wanted members' on-camera responses to be spontaneous and genuine. With the major time constraint, we knew there was no room for 're-takes'. We had to get it right first time, and I wanted it to reflect our high quality of work – so it was a huge challenge, but one I think we met very well."

Even more impressively, the film was edited, streamed and ready to upload onto the Chapter's website the same day, where it is now helping to attract new visitors. "The challenges of producing an entire video in just ten minutes were enormous, especially since we promised members that they would be able to watch it on the website later that day. Teamwork and preparation were the keys," he added.

The one person forewarned about Terry's plans was BNI Assistant Director Susie Godwin who, as a professional model and actress, had agreed to act as presenter for the video. Her quick thinking even resulted in the film getting a perfect ending – when she interviewed a visitor after the meeting, who offered enthusiastic feedback, revealing that she had just applied to join the chapter!

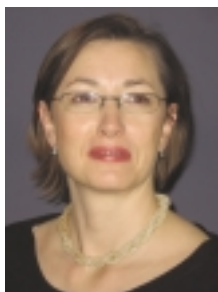
Gold Cup members were suitably impressed and Chapter Director David Morris commented: "Terry's whole approach was amazing. They achieved it without disrupting our meeting and now we've got a professional promotional video that creates a great impression with potential visitors. I can't see anyone forgetting his presentation in a hurry!" •

Contact Terry on 01451 850646. The video can be viewed on Gold Cup's website at: www.goldcupbni.co.uk



Let's value the female dimension in business

Says Lee Majhen-Keeler, Retiring Chapter Director of Nottingham's Plains Chapter.



As a female chapter director and woman in business, I have always been keenly aware of the male dominated aspect of business in general and networking groups specifically. On a personal level for my business, I have always viewed this as a plus – because it gives women an advantage.

Let me explain. Women in business are still seen by some as a blip in the economic system, but no fewer than one million women became self-employed last year (an increase of 10% over the previous four years) and this means that 36% of the newly self-employed are women - with the trend increasing each year.

With a third of new businesses being created by women, and a growing amount of government money being invested in helping women take up a larger share of the self employed market, it would seem that this blip is not only here to stay but is on the increase.

Despite these statistics, a disproportionate volume of my work as a trainer in personal development and communication skills is done with self-employed men. Why? Because, ignoring the obvious dominance of males in this marketplace, men often need to improve these skills more than women.

The fact is that females have particular skills that make them an asset not only in the boardroom but also to networking groups. They are excellent organisers with an ability to multitask, and have empathy levels that gives them a unique insight into other people's situations and feelings, making it easier to build relationships at a deeper level.

Most women also have a higher ability to interpret and use non-verbal communications (even if that doesn't extend to reading maps without first turning them upside down!), giving them the ability to understand the real message behind a person's words. And, dare I say it, they are generally more skilled in verbal communications than men.

All of these things make women a great source of referrals and an asset when it comes to building a chapter, especially when part of its leadership team. This is why I view being a woman in BNI as a plus, because not only can

these skills be used to build chapters, leading to more referrals and more business, but on a personal level it also means that any professional support I give to my male colleagues will heighten their personal development and communication skills, giving them an edge in their own field and a better awareness of mine. For me, that leads to better relationships and more referrals.

As we all know, BNI's philosophy works. It is a great source of referrals and for some members, their primary source of business. But to get the best out of their female counterparts, BNI's male contingent also needs to understand that women start new businesses and join networking groups for different reasons to men. For example, while only 2% of men cite family commitments as a key factor in becoming self-employed, 21% of women say this is the main reason. Hardly surprising given that women take responsibility for 70% of all family care – a fact that male-dominated networking groups sometimes fail to take into consideration where women are concerned.

Women place a high priority on receiving support and acknowledgement for the often wider and more demanding role they fulfil in meeting life's commitments, so when they are thinking about joining a networking organisation, their first choice is more likely to be one whose leadership and members are willing to take this factor into consideration.

As women continue to make up more and more of the self-employed sector, and play an increasing role in business generally, it would be a significant lost opportunity to miss out the unique skills they provide, not least in their innate ability to network and bring in referrals. Something to think about perhaps, as your chapter looks to increase its female representation? •

Lee Majhen-Keeler is managing director of Myriad Training (East Midlands) Ltd, specialists in personal development and communications skills training and emotional based business support. She can be contacted on 0115 841 3682, or at: info@myriad-training.co.uk.

Are YOU a card-carrying member? You should be!



NOW I KNOW!
Ian Cooper with his valued card holder.

Like more than a few 'new' BNI members, Ian Cooper had always been a little sceptical about the value of carrying the members' card-holder around with him. It really wasn't his style, so instead he carried a more discreet printout of his contact database (fitting neatly into his diary) and used this to provide contact details, following them up with a call or an email.

For a while, it seemed to work pretty well but then, to quote his own words: "as the legendary Max Bygraves would say, let me tell you a story..."

It happened only a few weeks ago when a longstanding friend, writer and publicist Roger Gould from his own Islington Chapter in London, gave him a referral to Doreen Henry who had recently been appointed to head up the Finsbury Park Business Forum, created to provide a one-stop shop giving free business support and advice - particularly for sole traders and start-ups.

Ian, who runs Eyedeecee Management, said: "I don't know how others feel about this sort of meeting, but I'm never sure how worthwhile it's going to be. Experience has taught me that you can spend a lot of time with this type of 'free to user' pseudo governmental organisation to little or no benefit. But Roger is a good guy and I trusted him not to 'send me up a blind alley', so I telephoned Doreen and we agreed to meet the following week.

"In fact, we had a great meeting. I came out of it with an agreement for me to deliver a series of fortnightly management & business skills events over the next year or so... plus referrals to another two similar agencies. And it all happened so smoothly because, although I'm pretty good at converting a sales opportunity, the fact is that Roger had already 'sold me' to Doreen," said Ian.

"He did that firstly by having an existing relationship with the business forum, so when Doreen took over and talked to him about some of the things she wanted to do, he saw

a business opportunity for me. And secondly, Roger and I have regular one-to-ones, so he already had a clear understanding of how I can help people. When he talks to a third party about me it is from a position of real strength, and that comes across as a very strong recommendation."

In fact during their meeting, Doreen said she was hugely impressed by the fact Roger was able to talk fluently about Ian and his business services - but what had apparently impressed her even more was the fact that he'd been prepared to do so at a time when he might have been expected to be selling himself instead! "She thought this was great, and spoke volumes for the teamwork and trust generated amongst fellow members of BNI," Ian added.

Where does the card holder fit in? "I have to admit I was wrong about that. It seems the icing on the cake for Doreen was when Roger opened his card holder, handed her one of my business cards and said he would get me to contact her. In that one action, he took away her problem and gave her a solution. By the time I went to see Doreen, it wasn't a question of whether we would do business together, but when and how much. That is what BNI is really about... and I'm grateful to Roger for reminding me that there's always a reason why we do things a certain way in BNI. It works!" said Ian. ●

Ian can be contacted on 020 8365 8183.

BNI's Dublin 'construction gang' head for building record

Meet three of the four BNI Dublin bravehearts who will soon be setting off to the poor townships of South Africa, joining 1,000 Irish 'labourers' to create a new building record - by constructing at least 150 new homes for some of the country's poorest residents in just one week!

Pictured (left to right) are painter Simon Barnes, interior designer Mary Taylor and plumber Ciaran Keane who, together with electrician Justin O'Brien, will be part of the largest ever Irish construction gang, all self-financing volunteers who have to raise at least €4,000 before they can join the Niall Mellon Township Trust building project.

The quartet are from the 40-Foot Chapter in Dun Laoghaire and, given sufficient sponsorship from their BNI colleagues, they'll leave for South Africa at the start of November, joining the biggest ever annual Township Challenge organised by the Trust, to work for seven days from dawn to dusk in grim conditions.

Irish property developer Niall Mellon launched the Trust in 2002 after visiting the Imizamo Yethu Township, Cape Town where he was so moved by the horrendous living conditions that he pledged to alleviate the plight of residents over a period of years. Niall pledged to community leaders that he would replace all 450 corrugated iron shacks with proper brick houses - returning the following year with 150 volunteers to build the first 25 houses.

Each year since, more Irish construction volunteers have joined the annual exodus to build a larger number of houses in a single week, and last November, some 358 volunteers built an amazing 70 houses. Mary, who runs Taylored Interiors at Blackrock said: "It is going to be a tough challenge, but we're determined to

give it our best shot. In return, we need BNI members to help each of us raise the money to participate in this worthy cause." ●

If you want to help, contact Mary on +353 (0)1 288 8635, or email her at: mary@tayloredinteriors.ie. Details of the event can be found at www.irishtownship.com



Artist Alan becomes Sultan of Networking

Despite being one of the North-East's best-known watercolour artists, Alan Reed would have been the first to admit that when it came to networking, he used to shy away from talking to people he didn't know and was never comfortable in a crowd.

But within a month of joining Surtees Chapter in Newcastle-upon-Tyne a year ago – and just days after attending a BNI Referral Skills workshop – he put his newfound confidence to the test, and ended up with a lucrative sale and a valuable business contact.

"My wife Susan and I were on a plane to Paris where I was doing some sketches for a commission, when she nudged me and said I should be trying out my newly acquired networking skills by talking to the man sitting next to me – something I would never have done before. So I opened up a conversation with him, started taking a genuine interest in his work and listened out for any comments that might lead to possible referrals for my chapter colleagues," said Alan, who is pictured above right during an overseas research trip.

"By chance we met on the return flight, and in turn he seemed fascinated by my work. We enjoyed chatting, exchanged business cards and the following weekend he called into my studio and gallery in Ponteland and bought one of my original watercolours worth £2000!"



Rosso e Nero: One of Alan's paintings.



But that was just the start of Alan's improving business fortunes. "Even though I'd been selling my paintings for 25 years, I was never very outgoing in the company of strangers. So one of the best things BNI has done for me is provide really helpful business and presentation skills training, which have made a difference to my business approach. With the additional support I've also gained, I feel far more confident." So much so that he's just become chapter director!

Last year was a pretty good one for Alan's business, with his work increasingly in demand from big-name clients, one of whom was the Sultan of Oman. "I was asked to quote for paintings of two hilltop towns in Oman but, because they have towers that are today in ruins, the Sultan wanted me to paint them as they'd once looked. I used old photos and did a lot of research to produce my sketches, with the final paintings based on his favoured drawings and now hanging in Oman's Royal Court of Affairs," said Alan.

Best known for his vibrant watercolour cityscapes, many of them images of Newcastle, Alan added: "Selling art is very competitive and I'm lucky to have been able to make a business from it most of my life. Even so, BNI has really opened my eyes to how other people do business, and given me a new appreciation of how best to approach the business side of my work." ●

Contact Alan on 01661 871 800, and see examples of his artistic talent at: www.alanreed.com

IF A PICTURE'S WORTH 1,000 WORDS...

Two East Midlands chapters now have their own unique centrepiece for meetings, after each being presented with original oil paintings as a 'thank you' from their joint creators.

The two similar but individual paintings are the result of collaboration between artists David Wood and Dora Harris, who wanted to acknowledge the impact that BNI has had on their thriving Nottingham-based art company.

David joined the city's Central Chapter six months ago and immediately found it so helpful to business that he persuaded his partner Dora to become a member of Two Valleys Chapter at nearby Ilkeston.

Together they run Vanilla Art, delivering 'tailor-made' artistic creations for clients, and while many of their original drawings – ranging from small cameos to big canvas creations – are 'finished' by painters overseas, the BNI paintings were all their own work.

Dora explained. "We wanted to give something back to our chapters whose members have given us such great support, resulting in a lot of new business and contacts. The paintings are symbolic, showing a male and female hand supporting a BNI breakfast bowl. Clouds in the background represent the early morning starts to meetings, with rays of sunshine representing the referrals passed, and stars – gold for members and red for visitors – creating a perfect vista for business."

Dora and David are pictured below surrounded by Central Chapter colleagues, with one of the paintings. "I hope their symbolism will help future members understand BNI's great philosophy," she added. ●

Contact David and Dora on 0845 826 4552.



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