

TOP TIPS FOR PROMOTING YOUR BUSINESS

BY K. SCHIPPER

Even a few years ago, promoting the business probably wasn't much on the minds of some awards retailers. A few choice spots in the Yellow Pages and stickers on the items going out the door were considered enough.

Then, suddenly, the world changed.

The economy took a dive, making every sale a little more precious. At the same time, electronic media started weighing in as serious sales and marketing tools.

When it can be just as easy for the average consumer to buy trophies from a shop across the country as the shop across the street, successful shop owners are finding it takes a mix of the old and the new to get the job of promoting their businesses done.

These days it's all about being connected, which can mean both a higher personal presence in the community and savvy use of electronic and social media.

THE HUMAN CONNECTION

Talk to enough successful awards retailers, and they will tell you two important things. One is that there is no single perfect way to promote a business. The other is that most individuals prefer to buy from people they know and like.

And, strange as it may seem in a world where "friend" has become a verb and some people aren't shy about sharing their most intimate moments with thousands of strangers, the strength of human connections is growing. That's why many

awards retailers make community involvement a part of their business promotions.

Don Svella opened a showroom for Laserwerks in Milwaukie, OR, with his wife Mary in early fall after retiring from two other successful careers. So far, much of their business involvement has come from membership in two chambers of commerce and a city business owners' organization, but he says he's surprised by how well these connections have worked to bring in new clients.

"By just going to the meetings, talking to people and telling them what it is we do, we've picked up many new clients," he said. "There's a strong feeling that people want to do business with local merchants and with people who participate in the same organizations."

However, he has observed the same feeling from people in other groups in which they participate: Kiwanis International for him and the Portland Opera Guild and Opera Volunteers International for her.

"The only selling has been to say, 'This is what we do,'" Svella said. "And, they come back and say, 'Can you do this?'"

Svella said there's one other thing he has learned from promoting his business through membership in organizations: it's necessary to show up. A shop similar to Laserwerks has a membership in one of the chambers to which the Svelas belong, but fellow members have told him they've quit buying from it because the owner doesn't attend meetings.

"I hate to sound cold about it, but in this type of business, you can grow by creating new business, or you can take away business from somebody else because you have better quality, better service, better price, or some other intangible," he said.

Chamber of Commerce members join Don and Mary Svella in cutting the ribbon for their showroom, Laserwerks, in Milwaukie, OR. The couple continues to get new clients through their involvement with local chambers.

