Outreach to the Business Community: How to Get Started
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Objective
To understand the value of a close relationship with the business community, and learn some basic ways to make those connections.

What’s the point?

Three reasons to spend the time:
1. Government leaders at all levels want to keep businesses in their communities.
2. Business owners hold influence in local decision-making.
3. Business owners who understand the value of library services become library advocates.
Where do I begin?

Three things to try:

- Join the local Chamber of Commerce or Business Association
  - Check their websites for annual dues – look for nonprofit, government, or educational organization rates
  - Check their calendars for networking events
- Make a list of local businesses using RefUSA.
  - Research email addresses.
  - Send a blanket email to each contact to request a 15 minute meeting.
  - Start outreach with the people who respond first, i.e. low hanging fruit.
- Explore Meetup and local social media groups for business networking.
- Other ideas?

Introductory email example

Dear NAME,

I want to introduce myself as your local librarian and share some free business resources that the library offers, such as digital business magazines and databases to help with marketing.

Please let me know if you have some time next week for me to drop in for a quick 15 minute chat.

Thank you!

YOUR NAME

Participate!
Get involved:

- By meeting them where they are.
  - Many groups have informal “coffee clatch” meeting meetings before business hours.
  - Show up and mingle. Bring lots of business cards.
  - Do house calls (library card, laptop and hotspot in hand).
- By offering to host once they get to know you.
  - All this takes is coffee, donuts, and the willingness to start your day earlier than you are used to.
  - Have a public computer (or more than one) booted up and showing some business resources (like ReferenceUSA).

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Tips & Tricks

- Award from the North Essex Chamber of Commerce for contributions to membership
Explain your value

What we’ve learned:
- LISTEN. The more you absorb, the more you can find ways to help and have an impact.
- Say “free” as often as possible.
- Don’t get hung up on what library card they have.
- Contribute. Offer to write a short article for their newsletter, or host a meeting.
- Other recommendations?

Donation from the Greater Swedesboro Business Association
Conclusions

- Make the first move. Accept that business owners are not going to find you on their own.
- Be flexible. You must be willing to leave your building to make connections.
- Be patient. It will take time for word to spread, but word-of-mouth really works.

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You can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you.

— Dale Carnegie