



# One Connection at a Time: Building Your Community of Peers and Advocates

Having a healthy group of peers and advocates can be powerful. Business owners can sometimes feel isolated as they focus on making their businesses a success, but women may be at an advantage. Their strong communication skills, along with their passion for networking and sharing, make them natural collaborators.

Here are some ways that they're reaching out to connect and communicate with others.

## Trade and business associations

Women business owners have a wide range of trade and professional organizations that they can use to make and build connections while also seeking out reliable business advice from others, digitally or in person.

No matter the profession you're in, it's likely that a trade organization or association exists to serve it. These can be a natural fit both for networking and for learning and career development. There also are organizations that serve specific niche groups, such as the National Association for Female Executives (NAFE<sup>®</sup>).

### Key takeaways



Trade and professional associations can provide female business owners with valuable networks and allies.



Social networks like LinkedIn can help you instantly connect with female business owners all over the world.



To network effectively, it's imperative to establish goals and objectives for the new relationships you seek to create.

This is just the tip of the iceberg in terms of the many organizations that exist to provide networking opportunities and business advice to women business owners. In the digital environment we now live and work in, there are also ample opportunities for women to connect with each other in online forums. LinkedIn®, for instance, offers thousands of online groups serving a wide range of needs and interests.

Despite the proliferation of digital connection opportunities, many women still like to get together face-to-face, and ample networking opportunities also exist in most local communities. Organizations like chambers of commerce, rotary, and other service organizations and a variety of local groups offer opportunities to meet new people, to communicate, and to collaborate. Doing a simple online search that includes “local organizations for women in (your city)” will generate a list of options.

## Online communities

Serving as the leading social network designed to specifically connect with other business professionals, LinkedIn provides a means for online one-to-one communications and connections. Additionally, LinkedIn groups can help you make connections specifically aligned with your business or industry.

Completing a search for LinkedIn groups related to “women business owners” has generated more than 350 results, including forums such as:

- Women Small Business Owners Network
- Center for Women Business Owners
- Women Business Owners & Female Entrepreneurs

And, as with trade and business associations, there are many more options, often related to very specific areas of focus.

## Getting proactive, getting out

For women who work in solo or virtual business settings, engaging in person-to-person interactions can be challenging. They need to make the effort to reach out to make critical connections. If there aren't enough local sources, reaching out online is a means to interact and establish those relationships. To network most effectively:

- Identify your objectives up front. What are you hoping to achieve? What results are you looking for through these connections?
- Identify and prioritize the audiences and opportunities most likely to help you achieve your objectives. Women business owners are busy; therefore, it's important to focus on the critical few, rather than the many, opportunities that exist.
- Focus on interacting regularly whether in-person or online. Set goals that you can realistically achieve. For instance, try attending at least one woman-centric networking event a month.
- Commit to giving as much as you get; networking is about mutual benefits. That means that in addition to reaching out to ask questions you may have, or to asking for support, make sure you're also contributing to discussions and offering your own advice and support.
- Join employee resource groups offered by your employer to connect with other women leaders and those who aspire to become leaders. Connections can be made during volunteer hours or even during meetings.

There is no shortage of relevant events to provide women with opportunities to connect with others who share interests and vocations — it's just a matter of identifying the right ones for you and then being proactive about reaching out to join those communities.

## Steps to consider

- Connect with trade and professional associations to gain access to valuable networks and allies.
- Social networks like LinkedIn can help you instantly connect with female business owners all over the world.
- To network effectively, it's imperative to establish goals and objectives for the new relationships you seek to create.



## The support you need

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