

Network with alumni associations

by Chi Chi Okezie, contributing writer

Networking is a valuable asset to entrepreneurs and business owners. It allows someone to build their brand and awareness, develop and foster relationships. As well as, generate leads, be an expert in their industry and an influencer in the community. An untapped, underutilized and undervalued aspect of networking is connecting with alumni associations. Alumni associations offer a plethora of resources, opportunities for businesses to develop, grow, scale and be sustainable.

In this article, I will offer sound and useful advice for forging quality connections and relationships.

Start with Procurement

Every college and university (in the United States) has a procurement department. Procurement is simply the means of how an institution conducts business with vendors and suppliers. Securing contracts and other related opportunities can make your business sustainable and scalable from consistent revenue. Depending on the structure of the institution, establishing your company as a trusted and responsible vendor can open doors to more contracts and business. Here are some simple steps to get started:

1. Research the procurement website / contact info on the institution's homepage or internet search
2. Understand the requirements to be a supplier or vendor.
3. Complete the application (online or paper form) and submit to the correct contact(s).
4. Follow up with an email to the contact introducing yourself and company. As well as, attach a capability statement (concise 1-2 page sheet of your company).

Build and Foster Relations

The next step is to build your company brand and awareness. Develop relationships with contacts in procurement, accounts payable, career services and the alumni association. Request to be included on email lists to be notified of events, opportunities and additional useful information. Also, follow the university, related departments and alumni/affinity chapters on social media. In regards to the alumni association, reach out to the director of development and alumni relations. Here are some simple tips to get started:

1. Request and schedule a short meeting (approx. 30 minutes, in person or virtually). Introduce / re-introduce yourself and company.



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2. Offer useful insights about your objectives, goals and engagement with the alumni association.
3. Ask good questions about volunteering, giving to the institution and other means of engagement.
4. Follow up after the meeting to gain additional insights and foster relations.

Incorporate Into Your Business Plan

Once you have registered on procurement, connected with administration and staff, consider including these activities in your business plan (under marketing and/or networking). In your plan, insert a calendar for volunteering, attending meetings and events. Also, include a budget and track expenses for associated activities. Align your goals with your overall business goals. Implement key performance indicators which you can monitor and benchmark your progress. As well as, where you can improve, develop or pivot.

Definitely use these tactics and helpful tips to network with alumni associations. Establish your business and brand and take steps to connect and build relationships. Follow a strategic plan to enable success and more opportunities for growing your company. **TE**



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