



The Voice of Your Customer

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Making Sense of Certifications, Associations and Memberships

By Crystal L. Kendrick

As a business owner, selecting certifying agencies, business associations and professional memberships can be an overwhelming task. These organizations traditionally focus the needs of business leaders and are typically segmented by ethnicity, geographic location, industry and/or gender. Some memberships may be required by your industry and/or your customer. Others are optional but very important to the success of your business as most business associations offer opportunities for training, development, marketing and networking. More importantly, memberships and certifications of third party organizations assure potential clients that a your business has the infrastructure to manage the scope of services required.

When selecting an organization, it is very important to consider the value of participation to your business and your clients. Many of these organizations require extensive documentation, hefty fees and periodic on-site audits of processes and procedures. Participation in an organization that will not offer a direct benefit to your business could be an ineffective use of your extremely valuable human and financial resources.

Here are a few other criteria you may want to consider when assessing the value of participation to your business:

- 1) Reputation among your target clients
- 2) Responsiveness to individual requests
- 3) Easy and public access to member contact information and scope of services
- 4) Effectiveness, frequency and attendance of networking sessions
- 5) Routine recognition of the scope of services and accomplishments of members in newsletters, email blasts, media programming and award ceremonies
- 6) Options for group buying discounts
- 7) Convenience

It is important to remember that these organizations are designed to develop businesses and create opportunities, not to secure contracts. Meaningful and diligent participation in these organizations can be invaluable to the growth and profitability of any business as most of these organizations offer access to affordable funding, upcoming business opportunities, low cost marketing initiatives and executive coaching. The value of participation is definitely what you make it!

Crystal L. Kendrick is the President of The Voice of Your Customer, a consulting firm specializing in survey research, market assessments, business trainings and social marketing campaigns named the 2007 SCOMBC Emerging MBE of the Year. For more information, visit www.thevoiceofyourcustomer.com.



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