



THIS ORGANIZATION IS IN THE BARTER BUSINESS

Business Owners Trade Alliance provides an array of goods and services for its members.

By Karen L. Chandler | Tuesday, January 31, 2017

Trade is considered the oldest universal currency in the world, according to Maria Wirth, managing director of the Allentown-based Business Owners Trade Alliance.

According to Wirth, trade helps savvy business owners grow their businesses in a time-tested fashion without spending money.

"It gives you an edge over your competition," she said regarding businesses that trade labor or inventory with other businesses that produce or provide something they need with no money exchanged.

BOTA is the largest barter exchange for business owners in eastern Pennsylvania, and is connected globally with the International Reciprocal Trade Association, allowing Wirth to represent her clients to more than 50,000 businesses.

Multiple trade scenarios offered by BOTA have included that of a member with an internet service company who needed a new computer monitor. That member accessed the equipment through another member by trading internet services as trade dollars.

FILLING NEEDS

Wirth explains that coincidences have to occur for businesses to engage in trade without a membership in a trade association such as BOTA: each needing the other's product at the same time.

Trading as unrelated as website designs for manicures occurs through BOTA, as experienced by Sheila Sacks of Sheila Sacks Designs in Mertztown. Sacks said her first meeting with Wirth resulted in a list of BOTA members needing her expertise in website development.

"When I need work, I'll call her," Sacks said. "They've been great at making sure I have money to spend through BOTA."

Members may also be eligible for business loans through the trade alliance.

"There are ways to use trade as a business loan," Wirth said. "Most barter exchanges don't offer that."

She cites cash flow problems as a factor experienced by businesses making bank loans difficult to acquire and the interest charged on those loans, creating additional financial burdens.

Using an interest-free loan through BOTA, a seasonal business could purchase necessary items prior to its busy season and pay the loan back in trade, she said.

Wirth said loans are paid back incrementally as BOTA sends them business.

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Scott Martz, BOTA CEO, and Maria Wirth, BOTA Managing Director, at the recent Nine O'clock Club presentation.



Scott Martz, BOTA's CEO, gave an example of a BOTA loan during a Nine O'clock Club presentation by Kim Davis, of KD Consulting LLC, Kutztown, at the Northeast Berks Chamber of Commerce.

A BOTA member with an auto body painting business needed a \$39,000 roof. According to Martz, the member could use auto body services to pay back an interest-free loan through BOTA trade dollars.

"We were able to loan them enough trade to purchase that roof," Martz said.

Martz explained that BOTA's 280 members pay an enrollment and monthly membership fee to accumulate trade dollars into an online account by providing services or goods for other members.

Those trade dollars can be spent via a shopping cart using the multiple categories on BOTA's member website, through direct contact with other members or by using the personal expertise of a trade broker at BOTA, he said.

BOTA earns a commission from each transaction and sends members monthly statements listing all the activities on their accounts.



BOTA members include, from left: Deborah Berger, Hasch Daal Custom Embroidery, Kutztown; Scott Martz, CEO of BOTA, Valorie Meyer of J.A. Meyer Fine Jewellery, Kutztown; and Maria Wirth, BOTA Managing Director

RECENT MEMBERSHIPS

Valorie Meyer, vice president of J. A. Meyer Fine Jewelry in Kutztown and a BOTA member, described negative experiences with recent memberships in other trade organizations.

Little or no access for items and services Meyer wanted to receive through trade, plus poor customer service, led to the jewelry store's membership in BOTA.

"The experience with BOTA is light years from experiences with other trade organizations," Meyer said.

Meyer said that Wirth will seek out whatever members may need. "She's like a bulldog. If you want something, she will hunt it down."

Martz confirmed it is in BOTA's best interest to provide a range of goods and services for its members to access with their trade dollars.

"If I don't fulfill their needs, we don't make any money on their sales," he said of the variety of BOTA businesses, including retail stores, printing companies, pest removal services and construction companies, all of whom Wirth describes as special and unique.

ELIMINATING INVENTORY

As an extension to trade, BOTA provides a forum for businesses to eliminate excess inventory through its trade alliances.

Wirth describes a scenario where a candy maker had a surplus inventory of chocolate candy. Rather than selling it at a discount rate or discarding it, BOTA could locate trading partners nationally to use the excess chocolate to sell or give as corporate gifts.

Her collaborative style allows Wirth to encourage partnership marketing among her members, who may have common prospects to target for their services or products.

"Sometimes it's just people being too shy to ask," Wirth said of partnerships that can be as simple as trading client lists or allowing counter space for a partner's business cards. "I'm always happy to do that."

BOTA members can rest assured that their businesses will be promoted through BOTA, according to Wirth, who brings a public relations' background to the trade alliance.

"I am a very enthusiastic promoter," she said. "We should be understanding your business to be your promoter."

BOTA is like a village with its time-honored trade economy, Wirth said, but it offers a competitive edge for members in a modern business world.



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