

Food's Up and the Bell Has Rung!

Rotary Speaker Tells Members "Use Email to Build Business"

By Stacy Kanter

With the clang of a large brass bell, the meeting commenced. First, a few quick announcements about local and chapter events, and second a tribute to America with the pledge of allegiance and a hearty rendition of *God Bless America*. Within minutes I was able to clearly distinguish just what it was about today's Bedford (Massachusetts) Rotary meeting at The Bedford Renaissance Hotel that seemed to make its members so happy to be there.

Factor number one: the food! An extensive buffet of deli sandwiches, pasta salad, and for dessert strawberry shortcake (complete with mountains of whipped cream!) had been ordered for this event. And second helpings were welcome!

Factor number two: the company. This little function room was brimming with a social and comedic atmosphere perfect for business casual networking and for coming together to implement charitable efforts.

Last factor, but certainly not least, all present appeared to be extremely pleased to experience this week's speaker, "CIO" (Chief Imaginative Officer) Ken Lizotte, from the next-door town of Concord. But moments before Ken took the stage, a silver bucket was held up, adorned with the Rotary Club emblem, and everyone began to chuckle: It was "Happy Dollar" time. As bucket-holder, a very comedic and genially sarcastic gentleman named Ken (not the speaker) worked his way around the table, stopping at each and every member to poke fun and request (or was it demand?) a donation. All members

responded, single dollar bills in hand, shooting back equally sarcastic comments at the bucket-holder, remarks typically pertaining to why they were in fact donating. No small fun was had as this process took shape!

Then attention shifted to the speaker's four college interns, seated together at the end of the long table. All of the members were excited to see fresh young faces attending their meeting. Dozens of questions were asked of them including where they attended school (Bowdoin College, Colby College, and Union College), what they were studying (anthropology, English, psychology, and sociology), and what the demands of their internship entailed. Together, the speaker's interns have been diligently working all summer, editing articles, conversing with editors, compiling book proposals, attending business meetings and retreats and other business functions. They had even been composing some of their own writing! So each intern happily responded to the widespread curious and positive attention, excited to share their hands-on experience in the business world. All sang praises of their boss, or rather more appropriately, their mentor, Ken.

Finally, time for the speaker, a certified management consultant and founder of his own consulting firm. Ken's mission, he told the group, was transforming business experts into "thought leaders," a term he defined as exactly how it sounds: an individual with the ability to generate insight and innovation in his or her field, and also a leader who can clearly articulate such ideas. The true value of one's ideas, Ken explained, is



Stacy Kanter is an intern with emerson consulting group inc. (Concord MA) which transforms consultants, attorneys, CEOs and professional service firms into "thought leaders." A psychology major and sociology minor at Union College ('07), she can be reached at kanter@union.edu or by visiting www.thoughtleading.com

when they are shared, especially through publishing books and articles, and through public speaking. Lizotte expressed his faith that everyone...everyone!... is inherently perceptive and innovative but that for most people, the trouble begins when one is asked to share their ideas. Fortunately his service has proven an excellent guide through the often intimidating process of both publishing and public speaking. With his help, over 100 previously unpublished experts have become published on a regular basis, gaining credibility unknown to them before seeing their ideas (and names) in print.

"Credibility is vital to all fields of business," he told the group. "And that's especially so for gaining new customers. However, credibility through publishing cannot be successful on its own. It requires proactive help from YOU!"

To illustrate, Ken noted that he and his firm had just been written about a few weeks before in the area's largest daily newspaper, the Boston Globe. Although such publicity reached literally hundreds of thousands of individuals, not one new client or even a single inquiry came his way as a result. This of course does not count the freelance writer in Acton (another neighboring town) who emailed Lizotte about a possible job!

However, the credibility gained due to this article, Lizotte said, was (and will continue to be) invaluable. He will post it on his website, he will use it as a hand-out at talk, he will offer it to prospective clients, and he will make an announcement to the 2000 contacts on his company e-list.

It was this last point that Ken Lizotte primarily came to expound upon, i.e., the critical competitive advantage of the wise use of email. In today's fast paced world, he said, using the post office for widespread mailings, for many businesses, is a thing of the past. Too costly, too time-consuming, too disruptive. Email has officially taken over as a powerful stay-in-touch tool.

Yet, do businesses utilize email as the imperative networking resource that it is? Obviously every business desires new clients but it's also well-known that the majority of these new clients are typically the result of referrals made by satisfied customers. Statistics show it's up to ten times more difficult to go out and find new customers than to gain new business from current clients or field referrals from them. So why do so many businesses spend superfluous dollars on marketing via advertisements, mailings, etc.? Instead they should be concentrating on strengthening their bonds with current and previous clients, Lizotte suggested. This has proven to be successful for his own business as well as for his clients that have tried it. And the fastest, easiest way to do this is by using email.

"When attending networking events, everyone tends to leave with a few business cards," he reminds the group. That card is usually obtained after talking for a while with an individual and making a connection. This seems great at first but then after the event is over, the prized new cards suddenly disappear. This happens to us all, we lose the cards, throw them in a pile, forget about them. Lizotte rails "We might as well have said to our new acquaintance: 'Nice meeting you, now please... never talk to me again!'"

Yet these are the very connections we must sustain. Everyone should keep an email list together including previous clients, current clients, colleagues, vendors, media, friends, family, acquaintances... virtually anyone whose email address might be relevant. Using this list, write a short, to-the-point email, Lizotte says, at least once a month. Find a way to stay in touch. Be consistent and show commitment.

"But an actual newsletter isn't needed," Lizotte added, as these can grow to be "too long and wordy: Who has the time to read such things? So your emails only need be a short list or paragraph detailing what your business has accomplished and/or what you are currently working on. Announce an article you have just published, or a tip or trend in your industry. Announce a new product or service. Whatever you do... announce something!"

Lizotte cites as an example his own monthly email called "*Thought Notes*." In this e-mailing, he provides little tidbits of advice, remarks, and a list of all of his client thought leaders' recent victories.

"But Ken, most people just delete emails," someone asked finally, with a tone of exasperation. "What of they don't even read my emails?" Lizotte was quick: "Doesn't matter," he snapped. "Even having your name appear in their inbox keeps your name and company fresh in their mind, so that if sometime they or someone they know do suddenly need your services, they will remember to call YOU!"

As Lizotte wound up his talk, members of the Bedford Rotary responded very positively to Lizotte's advice. One of the organizers said that typically over the course of a year of weekly presentations, only 5 or 6 presenters seem to offer true nuggets that members can actually use. "Your talk today fits into that category," she said.

As Ken concluded his speech, an overwhelmingly enthusiastic applause resounded in the room. The members seemed thoroughly impressed with the crucial information Ken offered them. Thanked for his appearance, and presented with the gift of a sparkling Bedford Rotary pen, Ken said goodbye and everyone filed out of their seats. Some members lingered behind to further network and chat with their peers. Everyone exited the small conference room at the Bedford Renaissance Hotel with smiles on their faces, happy to have eaten, connected, acquired useful new information and refreshed themselves for another workweek. Such results would keep them coming back week after week after week.