



2019 BUSINESS NETWORKING EVENT SURVEY REPORT



LEIGHTON-LINSLADE
TOWN COUNCIL

Business Networking Event 2019 Evaluation Report

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2019 Business Networking Event Multi-Agency Partner Groups & Sponsors :



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Evaluation Report

The spring 2019 Business Networking Event took place on Wednesday 24th April 2019 between 6pm – 8.30pm at Leighton Buzzard Golf Club. The following data and anecdotal feedback was gathered from completed Evaluation Forms on the night, responses on Survey Monkey, pre-registration questions placed on Eventbrite and comments posted on social media, thus proving an overall view of the value of this event to the business community and the partners involved in hosting the event.

1. Attendance Data

- 1.1. 177 people registered through Eventbrite pre-event. 192 attendees registered in total with 15 having registered on the night. 77 registered attendees did not show up. There was some double bookings, either people registering twice or registering for two or more spots for their company using the same name.
- 1.2. Final attendance estimate was 117 people for the night.
- 1.3. Registration by business/staff size:

1 – 2:	82 (48%)
3 – 10:	46 (27%)
11 – 50:	28 (16%)
50+:	15 (9%)

2. Budget (Leighton-Linslade Cultural & Economic Services Budget)

- 2.1. The Cultural & Economic Services Committee's Business Development budget (101/4510) in financial year 2019/20 is £2,000. Previously reserves were earmarked for the expenditure for pre event advertising, marketing, the hire of the one tap Blendology system and other costs required to be paid prior to the new financial year. This will now change so all pre-payments are made out of one financial year only moving forward.
- 2.2. £975 income was generated this year via sponsorship (£150 each) from Hascat Safety, Bee Local, LB Connect, Central Bedfordshire Council and Federation of Small Businesses. 4 Local businesses or support groups also took a paid stand at £75 each (inc. Golf Club therefore a reduction in hire charge).
- 2.3. Year 1 income target of the 3- year plan is set at £1,000 whereby we fell £25 under, however this could be offset by the fact the Golf Club reduced their hire fee to have a stand at the event instead of paying it as an income.
- 2.4. Due to a remaining balance from the 2018/19 event, it was agreed by request of the main sponsors, to reduce their sponsorship income donation for this year's event, and to ensure that they secure the funding from their respective businesses. The fee for smaller promotional stands was increased due to gaining valuable stand space in the main networking room, as opposed to a side room as last year.

Venue & refreshments	£945.00
Merchandise	£246.50
Advertising/ Publicity	£630.31
Leaflets/banners print costs	£72.39
Prize draw – Amazon voucher	£50.00
Blendology (digital name badges)	£650.00
Speaker	£175.00
Photographer/ expenses	£100.00
Staffing Costs	£216.21
Total	£3,085.41

Core budget (LLTC)	£2000
Budget including income (Sponsors and stands)	£2975
Expenditure	£2869.20
Remaining Balance (Additional event staffing costs of £216.21, coded to LLTC event staff budget)	£105.80

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The total amount spent on the event including advertising, venue, refreshments, photographer, merchandise was £2,869.20 - leaving a balance of £105.80. This does not include staffing costs (£216.21) which to date, LLTC has never reclaimed from the event budget.

3. Feedback/ Debrief

The following feedback has been collated through **65 pieces of feedback** from attendees at the event plus through the partner debrief meeting. The following points were noted and agreed upon:

- 3.1. The event was successful in terms of attendance and meeting the needs of those attending. Overall, it was felt there was “**a great buzz**” throughout the evening and the “**chatter didn't stop**”, (verbal quotes taken on the night.)
- 3.2. Good continued use of the free Eventbrite online registration software, and its ability to link with Mail Chimp to allow invitations for next year. Provides scheduled email reminders prior to the event and the opportunity to gather useful data of issues the local businesses face whilst they are registering to attend the event. Using these methods streamline the preparation ensuring an efficient and effective work approach.
- 3.3. The use of Blendology was once again a successful tool for attendees, acting as an ice breaker and an ease of way to exchange data/ information electronically. The statistics and analytical information provided valuable data and local business information, providing a more accurate analysis of the event participation and volume of actual networking that took place.
- 3.4. The contact list was also generated and shared through Blendology with each attendee receiving details of those they had connected **within 24 hours** of the event finishing, plus a list of all registered attendees without contact details attached.
- 3.5. This year all stands were placed in the main networking room with refreshments placed in the centre of the room, with some relaxed seating around the bar & refreshments area. This created a good flow around the room for networking and atmosphere, this change in layout was received well.
- 3.6. A Speaker was bought in to provide a short presentation and discussion on how to use social media to create a personal brand and boost sales. Previously, Speakers had not always been well attended, or able to be heard. The subject matter must always be relevant to the time (a hot topic) for businesses. Feedback confirmed the Speaker was a success and well received. The use of the adjacent room at the Golf Club well placed to keep connected with the main networking room. Seating and tables were also placed here to keep in line with a relaxed informal evening.
- 3.7. 1 Speaker currently remains suitable for this event with 2 time slots delivering the same presentation. This allowed attendees to choose a time slot preferable to them and minimise disruption to the networking opportunities. Also, it allows for attendees arriving at different times during the evening.
- 3.8. The planning group further agreed that the venue remains to be a good purpose built location with good on-site facilities required for a business networking event/ environment, plus ample parking. We were well supported prior and during the event. Feedback on the venue and food options has been on the whole, good although it does take a large chunk of the budget. Staff were attentive to ensure hot drinks remained flowing and dietary requirements catered for.
- 3.9. The engagement of Business Network leaders to promote their network through a stand at the event proved challenging. Whilst good number of network group stands were secured, an additional 1-2 stands would have been preferable for interest and income. The event steering group will explore the use of creating a ‘sponsorship/ stand package’ to highlight the benefits and value that may be gained by doing so. This would be supported by data and statistics gained from the feedback forms. A good up-take on this will help in achieving the income targets set out for Year 2 & Year 3 of the 3-year business plan. This would be further helped and supported by gaining an additional sponsor into the partnership.

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- 3.10. Focus was placed on an increased social media campaign this year, with a 6-week lead prior to the event. Each sponsoring partner received a Social Media post highlighting their sponsorship role and information in regard to their business/ company services and offerings. This will continue next year with an additional post on networking for first time attendees.
- 3.11. The Business Networking publicity was moved inhouse to create posters/ banners/ advertising in line with other Leighton-Linslade Town Council (LLTC) events. Previously, all partners undertook various activities for creating promotional material. This streamlined delivery workload.
- 3.12. In addition, Council staff made a point of attending other business networking groups in the run-up to the event to offer a personal invitation and to evidence the Council's interest and support of local business.
- 3.13. Working as a joint organising committee remains valuable to the event, increased collaboration has created more effective working partnerships amongst the committee partners.
- 3.14. A £50 Amazon voucher or a Round of Golf for 2 prize was available as an added incentive to register and attend the event. The winners were randomly selected from those who attended the event via the Blendology post event attendees list.

4. Survey Data and Anecdotal Feedback

- 4.1. 2,874 total connections were made on the night.
 Total Unique Connections - 1,939
 Average Unique Connections - 17

Unique connection is when you tap with someone.

A number of questions were updated from the previous 3 years as they were either no longer relevant, or required merging. The Evaluation Form 2019 is a one- sided form following previous feedback that it was too long.

A total of **65** responses were gathered on the night and via survey monkey:

- 4.2. Have you attended before?

Yes	No
19	45
30%	75%

- 4.3. Did the event meet your expectations and would you attend future events?

Yes, fully	Yes, somewhat	No	Don't know
40	21	4	0
62%	32%	6%	0%

- 4.4. Is this event useful to you and your business?

Very useful	Somewhat useful	Not useful	Don't know
32	29	3	1
49%	45%	5%	2%

- 4.5. How likely are you to recommend this event to other businesses?

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	Very likely	Somewhat likely	Not likely	Don't know
4.6 How many new contacts have you made this evening?	37 58%	22 34%	5 8%	0 2%

0 – 5	6 – 10	11 – 15	16 – 20	21+
12 19%	27 42%	20 31%	2 3%	3 5%

4.6. What led you to attend tonight's event? Please check all that apply:

Make new contacts 52 80%	Learn about local business support 18 28%	Speaker 12 18%
Discover new network groups 13 20%	Learn about networking 5 8%	See the venue 2 3%
Share information about my business 23 35%	Other: invited by a Cllr.	

4.7. How did you hear about the event? Please check all that apply:

Personal invitation 16 25%	Outdoor banners 0 0%	Word of mouth 14 22%
Social media 13 20%	Bee Local 5 9%	Networking organisation 8 12%
About Town 2 3%	LBO 2 3%	Online search 2 4%
Business2Business Business MK 3 5%	Leaflet/ Poster 0 0%	Leighton Buzz Radio: 2 3%
Other: 4 6%	FSB, Eventbrite, Buzzard Networking, Business Partner, Friends and Bee Local	

4.9. Please rate the following aspects of the event:

	Excellent	Good	Average	Below Average	Poor	Don't Know	
Scheduling & Time	37 58%	21 33%	3 5%	0 0%	2 3%	1 2%	64
Invitation	35 54%	20 31%	3 5%	1 2%	0 0%	6 9%	65
Ease of registration	46 72%	14 22%	2 3%	1 2%	1 2%	0 0%	64
Food & Beverage	26 40%	22 34%	9 14%	2 3%	0 0%	6 9%	65
Parking & Directions	32 51%	22 35%	8 13%	0 0%	0 0%	1 2%	63
Speaker	23 38%	12 20%	3 5%	2 3%	2 3%	1 3%	60
Choice of Venue	40 65%	17 27%	2 3%	1 2%	2 3%	0 0%	62

4.10. How would you rate the Blendology digital badge system?

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Excellent	Good	Average	Below Average	Poor	Don't know
43	15	2	2	1	2
46%	23%	3%	3%	1%	3%

4.11. Overall, how would you rate this event?

Excellent	Good	Average	Below Average	Poor	Don't know
32	26	2	3	2	0
49%	40%	3%	5%	3%	0%

4.12. What is your greatest challenges to your business at the moment?

Domestic Economy	16 13%	Access to Finance	10 8%
Labour Costs	7 5%	Input Costs	4 3%
Tax Burden	9 7%	Fuel Costs	4 3%
Consumer Demand	16 13%	Utility Costs	4 3%
Rent / Premises	21 16%	Cost of Finance	5 4%
Skilled Staff	18 18%	Other : Funding, Attract new clients, Competition	67 52%
Foreign Economy	3 2%		

4.13. What you would like to see next year & any other comments and feedback?

Positive feedback:

- *Fantastic event with great attendance.*
- *Happy to always attend (1st time attendee)*
- *Very Useful for start-ups*
- *The Best Networking Event I've been to*
- *Love It*
- *I liked the tap device*
- *I had a great evening, there were a lot of people, and I made some good contacts.*
- *Very friendly atmosphere*
- *The event was great, good format, great venue and good mix of attendees.*

Negative feedback:

- *Expected more.*
- *More Exhibitors*
- *I think the organisers need to look at a larger venue.*
- *Disappointed with the interest of my business. People seemed more interested in talking about themselves.*
- *It was a lot smaller than I expected.*

Constructive criticism:

- *Delegate list as couldn't connect with those I wished to!!*

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- Better food labelling
- Bigger name of company (on badge?)
- The digital badge is great, but does not let you to link a comment of the discussed topic to the new acquaintance
- I attended the business network meeting last week and was very impressed by your technology however, disappointed that the delegate list with all contact details is available. There were delegates there which I was unable to connect with and feel that I've lost an opportunity of contacting via telephone or email. I understand fully about the Data Protection side of things but is there any way I can obtain a delegate list for the event?

Feedback on Social Media:

I went, not many familiar faces but I suppose that's the thing about networking.... was busy. I enjoyed it, nice free flowing and the water bottles are great from the town council.

It was worth going. The talk was interesting around Social Media Marketing and lots of people of which very few I got to speak to. Well organised and lovely touch to lay on some nibbles and hot drinks. Apologies if others were there and I didn't get to speak with you.

It was lovely to see some familiar faces, put faces to names and to meet new people. Fab event - but could have done with more time to chat!

It was a great event. Better than last year (not sure why). Talked to LOADS of people. Speaker was good too - inspired me to get my LinkedIn account sorted out.

It was great and some good connections were made

I went, didn't know what to expect and it was really good, made some great new connections and was able to put a face to some familiar names which was great. The venue was nice, although they could defo use an interior designer, didn't go to the SM talk but I would say all in all a good networking event, especially as its free!

It was much better than what I expected. There were many people to talk to, exchange experiences and be in contact with for future collaborations. The Leighton-Linslade Town Council Official has organised the event very well, from my point of view, and the Leighton Buzzard Golf Club was a very nice venue. I had many ideas to develop in the future for my business. Thanks to all the people with whom I had the chance to speak!

5. Recommendations

- 5.1 Continue to use the free version of the Eventbrite online registration tool for its ease of use with the pre-registration of attendees.
- 5.1. Continue to use various methods to capture useful feedback to determine, document and support the value of the event for local businesses. Continue to utilise the pre-registration process to capture some data formerly obtained in post event evaluation.
- 5.2. Continue to work in collaboration with partners (CBC, FSB, LB Connect, Bee Local, Hascat) on the delivery of the event in order to share knowledge, workloads and useful contacts, to build relationships within the delivery group and share feedback on 'business challenges' for further exploration.
- 5.3. Explore the use of creating a 'sponsorship/ stand package' to highlight the benefits and value that may be gained for stand holders at the event and to gain an additional sponsor. To be supported by data and statistics captured from event feedback.

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- 5.4. The above will also assist in meeting financial targets for future Business Networking Events Year 2 & 3 as set out in the 3 year business plan of which a financial commitment has been agreed for a further 2 years by the Cultural & Economic Services Committee, providing a continuation of the evaluation process and to deliver an increased perceived value to the event for attendees.
- 5.5. Continue to invite all networking / membership groups to attend the event and look to expand our business network leader's invitation list for stands. Consideration of sending an 'early-birds' invitation to local businesses to gain an idea of interested parties in regards having a stand and at a reduced rate.
- 5.6. Look into possibility/ ability to highlight attendees present on the night and in line with data protection with the contact sharing device next year i.e. Blendology.
- 5.7. A speaker next year should be off similar cost, no more, to remain within budget unless specific sponsorship is secured.

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