

# Community key to Elite reaching new heights

In sharp contrast to many businesses during this economy, 2009 has been a banner year for Elite Telecom Services. I attribute this success to three primary areas: actively networking, giving back to the community and offering a product/service that is an economic value for small businesses.



**VIEWPOINT**  
Mike Russell

**1. Actively networking.** To be successful in this economy, a business must remain active in local business associations and chambers. I have actively participated in events at the Metro Atlanta Chamber and was honored to be recognized as a finalist for the Metro Atlanta Chamber Small Business Person of the Year. That recognition, coupled with the many chamber networking events, has helped to keep us on track to our most profitable year ever. Reaching these goals has not come easy, but much of our success is something that other businesses should consider for themselves as a realistic and obtainable goal.

Regrettably, in the face of constricting budgets, many business owners made the decision this year to cut their community involvement by not renewing memberships and suspending sponsorships. This has not only affected the community, but their business as well. Membership fees to networking groups are a small investment for keeping you and your company in front of potential clients.

**2. Giving back to the community.** Elite Telecom Services has a long-standing policy regarding community involvement and "giving back." Giving back is not always easy because at the end of the day you still have a business to run. However, if you have the ability to become involved there is always an organization in need. If you're not sure where to start, pick an organization or nonprofit that means something to you, like the American Cancer Society or Children's Healthcare of Atlanta.

If you do not have capital to invest in the community consider other forms of involvement, such as time or services. I have become active in the arts, recently serving as chair of the Kennesaw State University College of the Arts Flourish Luncheon to raise money for student scholarships (which resulted in being honored as the Volunteer Board of the Year by the school). I also served on the community relations committee for the WellStar Foundation. These well-deserving organizations benefit from the help of companies like Elite Telecom Services and, coincidentally, people prefer to do business with those who care about their community.

Consider this: You could spend countless hours trying to reach prospects via phone or direct marketing efforts only to be shut down. If instead you find yourself serving alongside that business leader at a monthly

board meeting of a nonprofit organization or working with them as part of a community team, your relationship and resulting opportunities would be much richer.

**3. Offering a service that is an economic value.** The fact that Elite Telecom Services provides a service that helps businesses cut costs on their phone and Internet access bills certainly fed our 2009 growth. Year to date, we have saved our clients more than \$1 million in voice and data service expenses. That offering, combined with the addition of a new customer service manager who allows us to make good on our commitment to deliver first-class customer service to all of our clients, has led to more referrals from existing

clients. Savings coupled with excellent customer service provides our clients with the economic value they demand.

Our unflinching commitment to networking, the community and service has allowed Elite Telecom Services to increase revenues and staff size at a time when many businesses were trimming their payrolls. Refocusing your business on these three areas will strengthen your company's ability to provide a partnering relationship with current and future clients.

Russell is owner and CEO of Elite Telecom Services and was a finalist for the Metro Atlanta Chamber's Small Business Person of the Year award.

## Innovation and intuition invaluable tools

My partner and brother, Jay, and I have what I feel is a unique perspective when it comes to how we approach our business. Some will criticize this as a head-in-the sand strategy, while we consider it a head down and full-speed-ahead strategy. It comes down to answering the question: "What do you do when it is raining outside?"



**VIEWPOINT**  
Jeff Albert

**1. Stop assigning value judgments to the events of your life/business.** How often in business and life do we react rather than respond? Often our attitudes automatically move to "This is the worst possible outcome!" Many times in life events that seem grim turn out to be our greatest turning points or learning experiences. What are you learning about your business and yourself during this economy? How are you making it better?

**2. Stop following the leader, be the leader.** I do not read industry trade magazines, as I am not concerned about what our alleged "competition" is doing. We approach our business based on sound business practices, innovative ideas and intuition. Many companies will again react vs. respond to whatever the trend is currently.

**3. Turn off the news.** Outside of Atlanta Business Chronicle, we do not read the papers or watch the news. There is an overwhelming negative focus with many of these news sources that do not support you in your attempt to drive your business and life passionately and successfully. The ABC gives us an unbiased and up-to-date view of what is going on in our local business

community. This is the data we will need to help us to direct our efforts.

**4. Surround yourself with positive people.** Our membership in the Metro Atlanta Chamber has introduced us to profoundly successful, intelligent and creative business people over these past eight years. As an active member in one of the MAC's CEO Roundtable groups, I can receive the advice of other non-competing entrepreneurs in a supportive setting that allows us to

collectively overcome the challenges that any of the group's members bring to the table at one of our monthly meetings. In addition to this, there are other business growth, networking and committee opportunities that we are involved with that have allowed us to depend on our inner circle when times get tough. It is in places like the MAC, my faith-based community, as well as friends and family that I look to as "home base" when it gets a bit stormy out there.

**5. Give back.** Whether it is on a company or individual level, acts of service will take the focus off our perceived "problems," and allow us to care for others in a positive way. This assists us to cut through all of the clutter to what is really important, and allows us to take a meta-view of our current state and to see it more clearly.

Albert is the owner and founder of World Logo LLC. He was a finalist for the Metro Atlanta Chamber's Small Business Person of the Year.

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