



HOUSTON WEST

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

In Business. For Business.

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

SPOTLIGHT ON SARAH CAIN

"THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE HWCOC AND OTHER NETWORKING GROUPS IS LIKE COMPARING A FERRARI TO A VOLKSWAGEN," SARAH CAIN SAID.

Sarah Cain started Sarah's Florist in 1987. She became involved in some smaller networking groups where she learned how to network.

"I understood smaller networking groups," Cain said. "It taught me a lot about connecting."

Still, it was challenging to grow her business with networking groups of only 20 or 30 people. By 1998, she was looking for a way to boost her floral shop's visibility and meet more customers. She joined the Houston West Chamber of Commerce (HWCOC) and has been an active member ever since. In fact, she describes the difference between the HWCOC and other networking groups like comparing a Ferrari to a Volkswagen.

"The Ferrari is this Chamber and it's stellar in supporting your business growth," she said. "I saw results."

Cain said that she donated flowers to every HWCOC event. Sarah's Florist would then be announced from the podium as the generous sponsor of the centerpieces.

"That was a great marketing tool to 200-300 people at luncheons and other Chamber events," Cain explained. "They'd hear my company name over and over again. I found that was a better way of advertising than newspapers, magazines or that sort of thing."

She also took advantage of the Chamber's email blasts to its members to promote specials and remind people about upcoming holidays when flowers are typically purchased. Another way she stayed in front of prospects was focusing on her brand. With thousands of other florists in Houston, she focused on what differentiated her floral shop and pursued businesses that would likely need floral arrangements.

"When we'd get an order from a business, we'd ask how they heard of Sarah's Florist and it'd so often be a Chamber connection," she said.

Cain said she also found tremendous value in being able to work with different groups within larger organizations as more and more members referred Sarah's Florist to other colleagues and departments.



**SARAH'S FLORIST ATTRIBUTES
A WHOPPING 40 PERCENT
GROWTH COMING FROM SARAH'S
INVOLVEMENT IN THE CHAMBER.**

Additionally, she found memorable ways for Chamber members to remember her such as introducing herself at committee meetings by handing a rose with her business card attached to each attendee. It was a clear and creative way to show prospects what she does and the quality behind the name of Sarah's Florist.

Her return on investment (ROI) soared with a whopping 40 percent growth coming from her involvement in the Chamber, Cain said. While other business owners may not have colorful flowers to distribute, Cain encourages others to get involved in this Chamber, develop relationships and show prospects that you're trustworthy.

"That takes time. If you're looking for instant gratification in revenue, you're not going to get it in any effort," Cain advised. "You have to work for it. Show up. Be heard and be branded."

Cain also added that asking the Chamber for help was essential. Cain found that women network differently from men and there was a great opportunity to develop a women-specific networking committee within the HWCOC. Cain approached HWCOC President and CEO Jeannie Bollinger with the idea and in 2005 the Women Driving Business committee was born as a series of networking events aimed at key business women in west Houston. While the

committee's event series has evolved from its early days, Cain continues to serve at the helm of this innovative way to bring women in business together.

After 30 years in the floral industry, Cain is expanding how she works with the HWCOC with a new venture that marries her love of flowers with her passion for fitness, health and nutrition. Her latest endeavor is the launch of another business, Fit & Fabulous with Sarah Cain, that targets Baby Boomers and Generation X to grow their understanding of the importance of nutrition. The response has been rewarding. There is a growing interest in health food, organics, hormone-free food and even a greater attention to food allergies, according to Cain. This provides a great segue for Cain to help people experience another type of beauty: living healthier lives.

"I'm reminding people that they have one vehicle to live in and they need to take care of it," Cain said. She plans to market Fit & Fabulous with Sarah Cain through the HWCOC, using the marketing techniques that continue to be fruitful for Sarah's Florist. By connecting with people whom she's met through this Chamber, Cain is now coaching HWCOC members on nutritious eating and exercise that fight the effects of aging.

"That's how membership in this Chamber keeps giving and giving," Cain added. "The support of this Chamber is incredible. I'm the same person with a new business and I'm coming back to the Chamber to grow again."



**SARAH
CAIN**

Tips that Cain shares with prospective and new members include:

- 1 Join this Chamber and get involved. "Don't pay the membership and then not show up, wondering why nothing happened. You have to do the marketing," she said.
- 2 "As a Board member of the HWCOC, it is our charge to help members, especially new members, learn how to be engaged. As you meet the members of the Board, don't hesitate to ask for help. The Board of Directors is a tool that I find members don't often utilize," Cain added.
- 3 Schedule a meeting with the HWCOC CEO Jeannie Bollinger to discuss how your business can help the Chamber and how you can maximize membership in this Chamber.
- 4 Participate in a committee that interests you. That allows you to get to know people in a more personal way.
- 5 Spend time developing relationships, not just handing out business cards. Earning people's trust takes some time, "but it's well worth the effort in the Chamber," Cain said.

