

Doing business at breakfast

by Amy
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Despite all the economic doom and gloom with which we are faced with regarding the economy, many businesses in Sutton are thriving. Their secret? Networking. The **Observer** finds out how business and breakfast can mix to prove it really is the most important meal of the day.



The Birmingham North Business Referral Exchange (BRX) group - based in Sutton - claimed the title of Best Networking Club in the 2009 Midlands Business Awards. (51)

It's not what you know it's who you know, so they say. But 'they' are wrong, or at the very least, misleading. It is not just who you know, but also who the next person knows.

And a Sutton group is exploiting that knowledge to the maximum, using weekly breakfast meetings to join up with like-minded business people in all fields to help their own companies boom.

Business Referral Exchange (BRX) has been running in Sutton for 10 years and, the members say, is the original and the best.

"We work on the basis that every person probably knows 1,000 people, and a good networker probably knows 3,000," says founder member, Stewart Evans.

"But we are better than other networking groups in that we teach all our members how to actually network effectively and get the best out of it."

The group meets each Tuesday at 7am sharp, and enjoys breakfast before gathering to see what members can offer each other.

Each person takes it in turns to say what their business does and the sorts of contacts they are looking for. Later everyone fills in a form stating to whom they would like to chat.

At the meeting I attend there are around 25 so-called referrals from just a few hours of not very hard work.

Members report turning over hundreds of thousands of pounds worth of business just through people they have met through BRX.

"We work hard to keep the wealth in the room," Stewart adds.

"Most companies rely on the old-fashioned ways of generating business like getting in the Yellow Pages or just sitting waiting for custom, but you only do real business with people you trust.

"You have to build the face to face contact. We're all experts in our own fields, but we're not experts in everything. You get a bank of skills here that you can call on, so you're not just getting business but you're getting support."

The theme of the meeting is 'love the recession', which you might think is easier said than

done.

But, as the speaker Edwina Silver says, more millionaires are created during a recession than any other period. Why? Because they adapt to the changes and exploit the opportunities an economic downturn creates.



The advice she gives includes compiling a 'dreams list' of all your goals and aims, however insignificant they may seem.

She advises staying away from negative people who can sap your energy and, from a business point of view, to concentrate on the aspects of the company that are getting you the best results, be that how it wins new customers or how it deals with complaints.

You may think Edwina, who is director of Premier Investment Properties Ltd, would not have much to be positive about in the midst of a credit crunch, but she has actually started up three

new companies in the past few months, aims to help create five new millionaires through her work and specialises in sourcing suitable buy-to-let properties.

And much of her success she puts down to networking, both in BRX and its sister group F4I, which specialises in property.

"Business and property can meet and connect," said Edwina, who won entrepreneur of the year in 2008 from the Midlands Business Awards.

"A lot of people think that the property market is on its knees, but that's not the case - there are still opportunities out there.

"With the F4I we always have

really good speakers, one of which is from the property market, so you get good inside knowledge on the latest happenings and trends.

"What we do know is that people are doing good quality business - the opportunities are phenomenal."

BRX holds its meetings each Tuesday at the Royal Hotel, Sutton Coldfield. To get involved call Faith on 01827 875 266.

You can also visit www.brx-suttoncoldfield.co.uk and www.foundationinvestment.co.uk for information.