

# Referral Advertising Trumps Traditional—Local BNI Region Sparks Small Business Growth Amidst Recovering Economy

*Local networking and referral-based organization, BNI WCF, brings growth to businesses through word-of-mouth advertising and referrals.*

**(Clearwater, FL) May 06, 2013**—In the recovering economy, small businesses are still lagging behind—in January, 2013, expectations for small business conditions were at their fourth-lowest level in nearly 40 years (1). [Business Network International](#) (BNI), the largest referral-based networking organization in the world, has helped generate over \$3.3 billion worth of business for members last year alone, passing 7.1 million referrals amongst its chapters—mostly small businesses. Local [BNI region of West Central Florida](#) (BNI WCF) was started by Executive Director Tom Fleming, and has helped his members pass \$89 million in business to each other over the past 12 months. This represents an average of \$49,500 in incremental business for each member in the past year alone.

The new economy has prompted small businesses to seek alternatives for generating revenue, and many have turned to one of the oldest forms of advertising: referral marketing. According to recent statistics on word of mouth and referral-based marketing, 92% of people trust recommendations from friends and family above all other forms of advertising (2).

BNI is the largest referral-based networking organization of its type in the world, and provides a structured environment for the development and exchange of quality [business referrals](#).

Many individuals and small businesses in Tampa Bay credit BNI WCF for their incomparable growth, including:

- [Massage & Skincare Solutions](#). Owner Alice Lange experienced 75% growth and gained 200 new clients in her first year with BNI.
- Kristin Votta of [Fitness-tek](#). Personal trainer Kristin Votta decided to join BNI after acquiring Fitness-tek. After one week in BNI, Fitness-tek began generating business from referrals. Today, 95% of Fitness-tek clients come from referrals.

- [Interiors by Laurel, Inc.](#) Owner Laurel Barnhart was in business for 21 years before joining BNI. After less than 5 months with BNI, Barnhart has closed business from BNI referrals to the tune of \$13,000.
- [Chiropractic Health Center, Inc.](#) Owner Dr. Albert Gadomski has been a BNI member for 7 years. Dr. Gadomski received his first referral 2 weeks after joining and has since secured weekly referrals from BNI.

Fleming, who has been heading BNI WCF since 2003, says that referral-based advertising is the key to building a substantial, resilient business.

“When used correctly, business networking and referrals are a powerful way to generate a significant ROI,” said Fleming. “Business is all about building relationships—that is where BNI comes in.”

The growth of BNI WCF is testament to the fact that the BNI model works. In the past 10 years, BNI WCF has:

- Increased chapters from 1 to 46;
- Increased membership from 13 to over 1,800;
- Over 1,800 members have passed over \$77 million dollars in new business amongst themselves in 2012 alone—that’s an average of over \$44,000 per member.

BNI’s success is measured by performance and numbers. This year, 46 BNI chapters in the West Central Florida region are on track to pass well over \$100 million worth of business to each other.

“BNI creates opportunity for substantial growth,” commented Fleming. “Proactive business owners would do well to recognize and consider the impact of referral advertising.”

BNI WCF is celebrating its 10th anniversary this year, alongside BNI’s annual U.S. National Directors’ Conference in Tampa on May 16-18 at the Tampa Marriott Waterside Hotel & Marina. The conference brings local 800-1,000 local BNI members and 400 director consultants from all over the country together to share ideas, network and listen to keynote experts and speakers.

For more information about BNI or the U.S. National Director’s Conference, visit them online at <http://www.bni.com/>.

*About BNI and Tom Fleming:*

Tom Fleming is the Executive Director for [BNI](#) in West Central Florida and the Referral Institute. When Tom acquired the region, BNI WCF had one chapter comprising 13 members. The region now has over 46 chapters with 1,800 members passing \$89 million in business to each other in the past year alone. Tom is sought out as a local, national and international speaker on the subjects of marketing businesses by referral and organizational development. He is also a contributing author in two best-selling books on referral based marketing, and has been recorded on many educational CDs produced from his speaking engagements. Prior to beginning his career as an entrepreneur, Tom worked for various Fortune 500 firms, earned an MBA from Babson College and a Bachelor's Degree in business from Boston University. Visit BNI West Central Florida at [www.bniwcf.com](http://www.bniwcf.com).

###

1. Rampell, Catherine. "Small Businesses Still Struggle, and That's Impeding a Recovery." *Nytimes.com*. *New York Times*, 13 Feb. 2013. Web. 25 Apr. 2013. [nytimes.com/2013/02/14/business/smallbusiness/small-businesses-struggle-impeding-a-recovery.html?\\_r=0](http://nytimes.com/2013/02/14/business/smallbusiness/small-businesses-struggle-impeding-a-recovery.html?_r=0).
2. Mielach, David. "Why Word of Mouth Trumps Traditional Advertising." *BusinessNewsDaily.com*. *Business News Daily*, 13 Apr. 2012. Web. 18 Apr. 2013. [businessnewsdaily.com/2353-consumer-ad-trust.html](http://businessnewsdaily.com/2353-consumer-ad-trust.html).

*Media Inquiries:*

Alyssa Kaplan

JoTo PR

888-202-4614

[www.jotopr.com](http://www.jotopr.com)