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## **MINDING YOUR OWN BUSINESS SERIES**

### ***How Does Asheville Stack Up on Business Etiquette, Ethics?***

A freelance writer here for more than two decades who has authored four nonfiction books and hundreds of published articles, says she has experienced a decline in business etiquette from email and snail mail responses to phone messages not returned.

Asheville area resident Marie Bartlett says “Today, story pitches are more likely to fall into a black hole, so the writers I know are left hanging with unanswered questions.”

She added that “there is a higher than 50% chance you will receive no response.”

Why is that the case? Are organizational executives in this depressed market too busy, too overwhelmed or just too discourteous?

The marketing director for one of the largest employers in Western North Carolina has a different viewpoint. “We try to be courteous to everyone who contacts us, but we receive an average of six solicitations every day.”

The director admitted a preference for working with local business people. “We often are approached by national firms who are simply making blind pitches with no understanding of our marketing objectives. They are given very little consideration.”

According to her, the smartest approach is a carefully structured email, followed by a phone call. That will usually generate a response.

Because of the time involved, unsolicited written proposals do not get much attention.

Unfortunately, there have also been instances of custom designed written proposals with ideas that have been “lifted” without compensation for the originator.

That is clearly unethical.

While the Citizen-Times has a rigid policy keeping editorial content separate from advertising, there are major exceptions on a national level, as well as in Asheville.

A recent survey conducted by a national business publication and an international marketing agency, shows that one in five senior marketers have bought advertising in return for news coverage. The survey results were release July 30<sup>th</sup>.

The sixth annual management survey was conducted by Millward Brown from polling 252 U.S. chief marketing officers.

Broadcast business coverage in Asheville is virtually nonexistent, unless it is connected to an advertising contract. You rarely hear business news on an Asheville station. Except for bad news, such as Borg-Warner closing the Asheville area plant.

On a more positive note, the Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce is a beacon over a sobering landscape, offering many seminars and workshops during the year to help members succeed in a very challenging market.

The Chamber recently conducted its annual mega networking event, drawing more than 100 executives looking for new business. The seminar leader advised participants to write personal letters to promising prospects for various business services.

However, only 26% of recipients responded to one such direct approach.

Unscrupulous business leaders can also suffer when they attempt to exploit employees and customers.

It was about two years ago when the president of Haywood Regional Medical Center tried to terminate the emergency room physicians, who fought back with public disclosure through a crisis communication specialist. That president was eventually forced to resign. But by then, capable staff professionals had lost their jobs and patients of the medical center became concerned over the quality of emergency care.

More recently, Asheville area television viewers endured a barrage of ghastly and misleading commercials from the Joe Gibson Mitsubishi and Suzuki dealership in Spartanburg, SC. No more. The dealership was forced to declare bankruptcy a few weeks ago.

Responsible business leaders do not want to fall into that category.

They should make certain the "house" is in order or take steps to fix it. A good start would be responding promptly and fairly to business inquiries.

For more information, CIB can be contacted at 828.299.0813 or by email at [imagebuc@bellsouth.net](mailto:imagebuc@bellsouth.net). The website is Carolina Image Builders.com