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## Ask the Experts: How Do I Network Overseas Without Relocating?

By BNET Contributor | June 30, 2011

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**By Kathryn Hawkins**

*Ask the Experts is an ongoing series, where we feature business owners facing problems they don't know how to solve. Want advice on your own dilemma? Email us: [ownersonly\(at\)bnet\(dot\)com](mailto:ownersonly(at)bnet(dot)com).*

**The owner:** Eric Chase

**The business:** In 1986, Chase launched Mansfield Heliflight, a helicopter flight operator. Over the years, his business has changed its primary focus, evolving to include helicopter maintenance and sales of refurbished helicopters sourced from all over the world. Based in Milton, Vermont, the company has 13 employees.

**Annual revenues:** Between \$10 million and \$20 million

**The problem:** Because the helicopter industry is small, Chase needs to travel all over the world to strike deals buying and selling helicopters — and he often has trouble networking with the right people from his home base in Vermont.

“You’re relying heavily on local contacts to make a deal go through,” he says. “When I meet with people who are two or three tiers down in authority, the deals often fall apart.”

In particular, Chase spends a lot of time in China trying to negotiate deals. And he has been frustrated with his lack of local connections. “We’re trying to build good contacts there and stay ahead of the wave, but it’s difficult to find a civilian aviation market,” he says. “Most of my contacts tend to be government or military officials.”

Because Mansfield Heliflight has been established for decades, Chase has built a good word-of-mouth referral business, but he's found limitations there: "You can have a list full of people who in reality aren't very well-connected, and aren't the people you want to talk to."

Moving his home base out of Vermont might help him establish new contacts, but Chase was born and bred there, and he believes his quality of life would suffer. Instead, he'd rather focus on building up a network of helpful contacts across the world from afar.

"How do businesses get involved so that they're on the call list when people are looking to buy or sell?" he asks.

### What the experts said:



"It is a real challenge to secure a global network of key contacts, and to be top-of-mind without being in front of them. My recommendation is an influence management program. First, it is important to understand that influence cannot be delegated. In the type of business that Chase is in, he cannot give his influence easily with an end-contact to someone else in his organization. So he must come up with a more efficient way to maintain relationships without having to travel all of the time. Here are a few ways to stay in contact:

Three-week cycle: Send an article/link/whitepaper to key contacts

Six-week-cycle: Send a small gift — something memorable and personal, with a note

Quarterly: Schedule a call to discuss market trends, business opportunities, and to re-connect

Semi-annual or annual: Visit in person

This approach maximizes contact and exposure while minimizing travel. You can drop new contacts into the system, work through them using the same tools and the administrative elements can be delegated for efficiency. The personal connection pieces such as the note or comments have to be done by Chase. However, this is much more efficient than travel."

– Tom Searcy, *Hunt Big Sales*



"The need to establish relationships to conduct business in Asia is well known, but the networking requirements of doing business in the People's Republic of China (PRC) are not. Relationship building in the PRC is a full-time job — you cannot spend enough time there to establish and maintain the relationships you need. As Kwek Leng Joo, former President (presently Honorary President) of the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry told us when we interviewed him for our book, *The Chinese Tao of Business*, it helps to know people and build relationships, but you can't just go there and build relationships every once in a while. If you have a full-time job elsewhere, you just cannot do it.

To be successful in the PRC you must establish successful relationships in three separate networks: family networks, business networks, and government/Chinese Communist Party networks. Most successful businessmen are members of more than one network, but a network serves all functions. If you cannot establish a full-time representative in the PRC to build your relationships and negotiate

your contracts, you will continue to have your present difficulties. If you choose the wrong representative, it is disastrous.”

– *George T. Haley, Author, The Chinese Tao of Business: The Logic of Successful Business Strategy.*

Readers, what’s your advice?

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