Is the chamber of commerce model still viable?

As I mentioned in the last post, I am not a member of my local chamber of commerce, and never have been. I am not alone. According to reporting in the Washington Business Journal (which I can't link to here because it is behind a paywall), membership is dwindling at the chambers of commerce in the Washington metro region.

Almost all of the DC metro local chambers have experienced a drop in members over the past ten years. The D.C. Chamber lost 15.7%, Montgomery County lost 17.8% and Fairfax lost a jaw-dropping 54.9%. However, the chambers haven't experienced a drop in revenue, since they have increased dues and other income-generating programs.

One of the reasons I haven't joined a chamber is because it is expensive and I feel there is little benefit. After all, there are plenty lower-cost to no-cost alternatives for networking purposes, not the least of is on social media. The other reason is that I find most chambers attract small businesses that may not have the budget for the marketing services I provide.

I would guess that the ease of using Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook to connect with folks, and then maintain the relationship is behind the remarkable drop in membership for the chambers. Why pay dues when you can easily network with people who share your interests or whom fit other parameters like work in a certain industry, live in a geographic area and others.

Perhaps the chamber model is no longer suited to our Internet-driven world. We no longer need the chamber membership guides to find people or services. We can look up services on any

number of sites, like Yelp, which may even have ratings. We certainly don’t need chamber networking events to meet people in person. One remarkable and low cost alternative is Meet Up. Meet Up hosts many groups of local people who share an interest, which can be as narrowly or as broadly focused as you like.

Do you think chambers of commerce will survive another ten years? I’d like to know if you are a member of chamber of commerce. Why or why not? Please tell me in the comments.