

Recession and social media helps UK business networking reach record profitability – Charlie Lawson, national director of BNI

by [Will Corry](#) on April 10, 2012 in [Business](#), [Lead story](#), [Research](#), [Small Business](#), [Startups](#), [View from the top](#)

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SME owners and employed businesspeople have profited more from structured business networking and have taken the practice far more seriously than before the recession, according to figures from the UK's largest business referral organisation.

A 45 per cent increase in invoiced business, as a result of structured business networking, has been reported among members of BNI (Business Network International) which has 13 000 members in the UK, who meet weekly to pass qualified business referrals to one another, in local groups all around the UK.

This increase has been calculated looking at two years within the past four years since the onset of the recession – 2008 and 2011 respectively. Membership numbers remained similar during both periods yet the amount of business transacted has had an incremental rise.

In 2008 the annual amount of total business passed between members was £185 million. In 2011 this increased to £269 million – an increase of 45 per cent. This is the largest increase in members 'thanking' other members for invoiced business referrals in the organisation's sixteen years in the UK.

Structured business networking

Charlie Lawson, national director of BNI, commented: *"Having measured the figures as we entered the recession to where we are now, it clearly indicates those embarking in structured business networking are taking the benefits of word-of-mouth referrals far more seriously as it's accounted for a larger portion of sales.*

What we know from our members, and believe to be the case for other businesspeople engaging in business networking, is that they are embracing a much wider range of networking tools beyond face to face, such as Linked-In and Twitter, helping to maintain relationships long after the breakfast meetings, networking events or making new contacts in the pub."

All business referrals exchanged between BNI members are tracked to ensure they have resulted in a qualified invoiced piece of business.