



**IT PROFESSIONAL  
USER GROUP/ASSOCIATION  
START-UP GUIDE**

*BUILDING A GLOBAL SUPPORT COMMUNITY FOR  
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (IT)  
PROFESSIONALS*

**May 23, 2012**

**Version 5.0**

---

# Contents

**CONTENTS..... I**

**INTRODUCTION ..... 1**

**What is an IT Professional (IT PRO) ..... 1**

**What is an IT PRO User Group..... 1**

**What is GITCA ..... 2**

    GITCA Benefits.....3

**Free Hosted Dot Net Nuke website ..... 3**

**50% discounts on Official Microsoft E-Learning courses ..... 3**

**PHASE 1 - ENVISION ..... 4**

**Defining the Focus and Mission ..... 4**

    Determining Goals .....4

    Developing the Mission Statement .....4

**Forming the Organization..... 4**

    Creating Bylaws .....4

    Setting Up a Board of Directors ..... 5

**Joining GITCA ..... 5**

**PHASE 2 – PLAN..... 6**

**Develop an Operations Plan ..... 6**

    Finances.....6

        Membership Dues .....6

        Sponsorship .....7

        Donations .....7

    Meeting Place.....8

        Facilities .....8

        Space Availability.....8

        Accessibility .....8

        Consistency.....8

        Meeting Place Best Practices.....9

        Food/Beverage Needs.....9

        Audio Visual (A/V) Equipment Needs.....10

        Potential Meeting Locations ..... 10

    Event Management ..... 10

Creating a Schedule/Agenda .....	10
Choosing Possible Topics.....	10
Finding Technical Presentations .....	10
Finding Speakers .....	11
<b>Develop a Marketing Plan.....</b>	<b>11</b>
Create an Organization Identity.....	11
<b>PHASE 3 – DEVELOPMENT.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Execute the Marketing Plan.....</b>	<b>12</b>
Create a Public Website.....	12
Develop Marketing Materials .....	13
<b>Execute the Sponsorship Plan .....</b>	<b>13</b>
Create a Sponsorship Agreement.....	13
Identify Potential Sponsors .....	14
1. Assess User Group’s Needs.....	14
2. Identify Potential Sponsors.....	14
3. Define Value.....	15
Recruit Potential Sponsors .....	15
1. Initiate Communication with Potential Sponsors .....	15
2. Meet with Potential Sponsors .....	15
3. Close the deal.....	15
Managing Sponsor Relationships.....	16
<b>Recruit Members .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>PHASE 4 – DEPLOYMENT .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Conduct Meeting .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Meeting Room Setup .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Signing in Attendees .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Conducting Raffles and/or Giveaways.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Clean-up.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Summary.....</b>	<b>18</b>
If you haven’t already done it, why not join GITCA today! .....	18

# Introduction

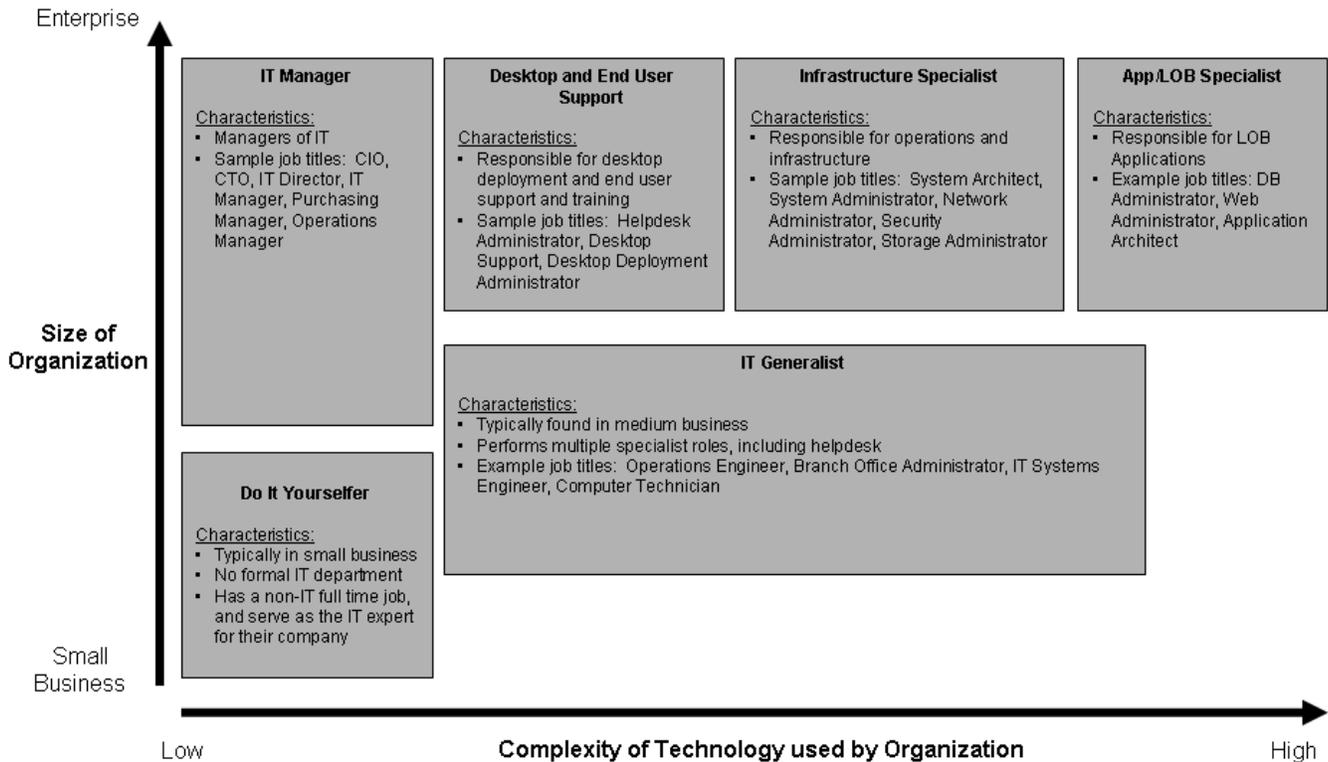
This document provides guidance for anyone looking to start an IT PRO User Group/Association [hereafter referred to as **GROUP**] in their community, and it also provides an overview of the Group support services available to member organizations of GITCA.

For more information about GITCA please visit <http://www.GITCA.org>.

## WHAT IS AN IT PROFESSIONAL (IT PRO)

IT Professionals (IT PROs) include executives, managers, or staff whose primary job function is the installation, maintenance, management, and/or support of information technology systems.

IT PROs also include people whose primary job function is not IT-related, but who, because of the absence of dedicated IT personnel in their organization, are responsible for and are actively involved in the installation, maintenance, management and/or support of information technology systems.



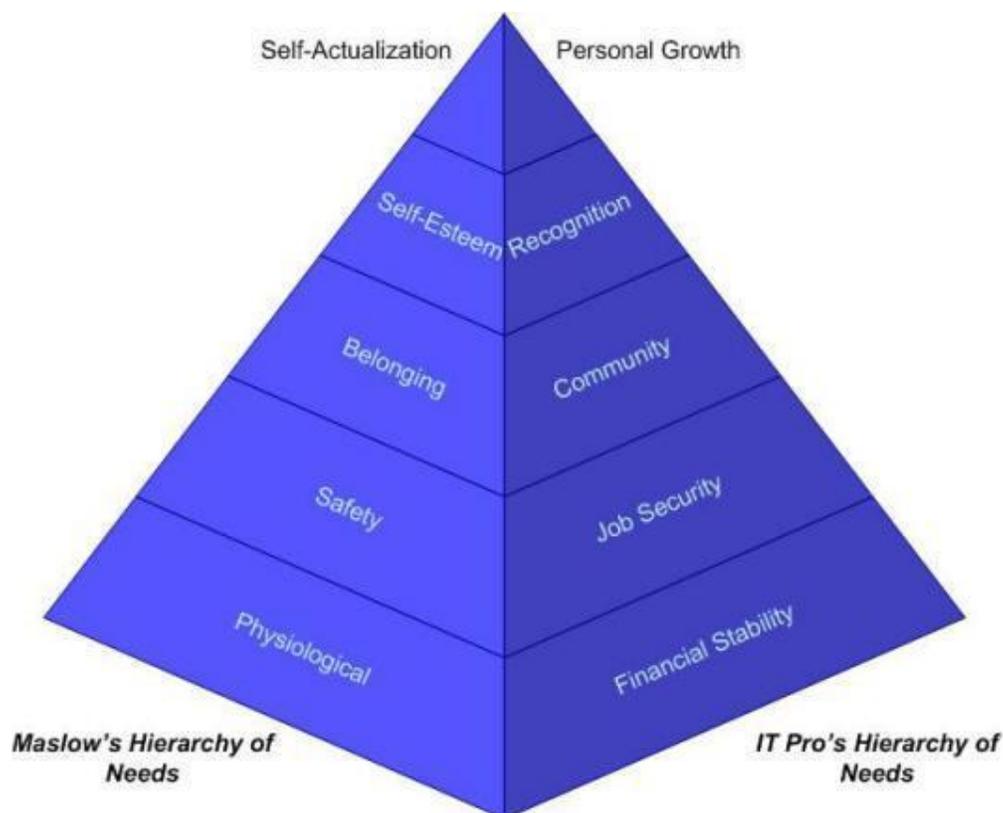
## WHAT IS AN IT PRO GROUP

IT PRO Groups are organizations that encourage like-minded individuals to get together, in-person and/or virtually, to discuss topics that are relevant to them. It is estimated that there are over 100,000 around the world, and they have proven extremely valuable in providing feedback on products and services to IT solution providers, essentially creating a "grassroots" movement for change. In addition to providing a forum for discussion and training, many of these groups participate in community service projects, such as assisting a school with building a computer lab or providing computer support for non-profit organizations.

---

IT PRO User Groups/Associations can vary greatly in their technology focus and the benefits they provide to their individual members, but they generally have the same goals:

- **Increase financial stability for IT Professionals** by providing expert career guidance and networking opportunities.
- **Increase job security for IT Professionals** by providing training on leading edge IT skills needed by the marketplace.
- **Build a sense of community among IT Professionals** by providing a collaborative environment.
- **Increase self-esteem by recognizing IT Professionals** for their accomplishments in both the workplace and the community.
- **Encourage personal and professional growth of IT Professionals** by providing learning challenges and promoting the concept of "lifelong learning."



---

## WHAT IS GITCA

GITCA is a Global Federation of IT PRO Groups dedicated to growing and supporting the IT PRO community. By serving as a bridge between the IT PRO community, leading IT solution providers and Professional Associations GITCA strives to:

- Assist IT PRO organizations in improving the skills, abilities and knowledge of their individual members along with the technologies they depend on.
- Encourage IT Pro organizations and IT solution providers to help their local communities by leveraging the expertise and the natural drive of IT Professionals to solve problems.

- Elevate the Status of IT Professionals in both the workplace and the community

Through the sponsorship and support of leading IT solution providers, such as Microsoft, GITCA aims to provide resources and assistance to the IT Pro community, while also providing the IT Pro community the opportunity to make feedback to the IT industry, government, media, IT Professional Associations and academia - the "Voice of the IT Professional".

## **GITCA BENEFITS**

### **FREE HOSTED WEB SITE**

GITCA member groups can either apply to Microsoft for a free copy of Office 365 [<http://www.microsofttraining.com/office365/>] if they are members of User Group Support Services [<http://www.usergroupsupportservices.com>] or apply to GITCA [[info@GITCA.org](mailto:info@GITCA.org)] for a free hosted copy of Dot Net Nuke [DNN].

### **50% DISCOUNTS ON OFFICIAL MICROSOFT E-LEARNING COURSES**

GITCA members can take advantage of 50% off official Microsoft e-learning courses thanks to an offer from Operitel. To take advantage of this, please go to the GITCA portal on their site at [GITCA.itskillbuilder.com](http://GITCA.itskillbuilder.com).

### **FUTURE BENEFITS**

GITCA is constantly seeking additional benefits that support the needs of the IT Professional.

**Following are the three phases required to create a successful Group:**

---

## Phase 1 - Envision

When starting up an IT Pro Group it is important to “envision” its primary focus, the goals and objectives of the organization, and the intended target audience(s).

### **DEFINING THE FOCUS AND MISSION**

---

#### **DETERMINING GOALS**

In order to determine the overall purpose and goals of a Group there are a few questions that you should ask yourself:

- Is/are there a specific problem(s) or issue(s) that you want to address?
- Is there a specific technology or career you want to focus on?
- What is the primary target audience that will make up most of the membership?
- Is it a public group, corporate group, academic group or some combination?
- Will members meet in person, online, or both?

#### **DEVELOPING THE MISSION STATEMENT**

Once you have determined the goals of your Group, you should review these goals and create a mission statement, which states the aims of the Group in a clear and concise manner. A mission statement is often helpful to keep a group on track when considering new activities. It can also help to prevent misunderstandings. Mission statements should be anywhere between one sentence up to a paragraph; the shorter and easier to remember, the better. With the mission statement you may want to:

- Communicate the purpose and goals of your Group
- Inspire the continuous support of the members of the Group
- State in a concise and convincing manner, so others can easily remember, the “reason for being” of your Group
- Demonstrate a proactive and progressive attitude within the IT community and society as a whole

### **FORMING THE ORGANIZATION**

---

By following these steps and creating Bylaws, as well as establishing a Board of Directors, not only will you be better organizing your group from the start but creating the standards that shall be followed in the future, and bringing yourself closer to being able to become a formal organization in law **if you wish to do so at a later date.**

#### **CREATING BYLAWS**

Bylaws are defined as the rules and regulations that an entity (i.e. corporation, organization, association) adopts to layout the foundation for their conduct, describe the character of the entity, layout duties, management of funds, and other internal administration roles. It may sound bureaucratic, but having documented and published guidelines can help to proactively manage disputes and misunderstandings that may arise when there are changes in positions in the Group.

## SETTING UP A BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Most Groups have a Board of Directors with a President or Leader as the principal position. Whichever way you decide to establish the organization of your Group, it is necessary to formalize and document the positions, responsibilities, duties, and duration of terms. Some positions to identify and fill are:

- President or Leader; maintains order during meetings, creates agendas, "face of the organization", etc.
- Treasurer; responsible for the budget and service plan offered, including due dates, membership requirements, alternative income. The people in this position are usually rotated with less frequency.
- Secretary: Responsible for documenting the summaries of Board Meetings. It's a good idea to publish meeting notes on the Group website (following the guidelines the group has adopted) so people are kept up to date on group status and plans.

Other positions, such as Webmaster, Public Speaker, Event Organizer, Project Manager, etc. will arise as necessary. All positions are important and leaving too much of the load to one or a very few individuals will potentially cause serious problems. Let's remember that these are usually volunteer positions.

## JOINING GITCA

---

There are several minimum requirements for an organization to join GITCA:

- 10 or more registered members
- Focused primarily on IT Professional issues (i.e. systems administration, networking, security, messaging, systems integration, digital media, technical support, technical writing and database administration)
- Non-discriminatory (group does not restrict membership based on sex, race, religion, or ethnic/national origin)
- Although most current members are Microsoft-centric or vendor-neutral all applications are considered
- Completion of the online GITCA Membership Form
- Review and approval of membership application by GITCA - providing a website URL during membership application will speed up the process

*To apply for membership in GITCA, please go to the GITCA website [[www.GITCA.org](http://www.GITCA.org)] and complete the online membership application.*

---

## Phase 2 – Plan

The following section provides information on how to plan the building of an IT PRO Group.

### **DEVELOP AN OPERATIONS PLAN**

---

An Operations Plan identifies the details on how you will manage the ongoing operations of your Group. This plan includes information on key areas including:

- Finances
- Meeting Place
- Event Management

#### **FINANCES**

It is important to know the type of expenses that you will have. Some typical expenses may include:

- Space rental (for meetings)
- Equipment (LCD projector, screen, laptop, wireless mic, software, etc.)
- Food/Beverage (depending upon the venue this can be prohibitively expensive)
- Publicity (local media will often give free advertising for non-profits)
- Shipping
- Website administration/hosting (look for free hosting opportunities)
- Insurance (liability and directors/officers)

In order to cover these expenses and manage your group finances correctly, you should set up a bank account and determine ways in which your group can collect funding to cover these expenses. Depending upon jurisdiction incorporation as a not-for-profit society may be required to open up a bank account. These are some funding options to consider:

- Membership dues
- Sponsorship
- Donations

#### **Membership Dues**

Some Groups charge annual membership dues, while others cover costs by other means. For those that charge dues, the amount varies from group to group, with annual fees ranging from \$5 to \$50 for individual members, and averaging \$30. Some professional chapters charge much higher, but they also often have a whole suite of benefits and professional recognition within the marketplace. Special rates are often available for students, senior citizens and multiple members in a corporation. Dues are normally assessed to cover the anticipated expenses of holding meaningful programs, agendas, and a monthly newsletter, but are kept to a minimum. Additional funding is often available, but should not be counted on for the normal meeting expenses.

Before setting membership dues, a group needs to determine the activities and services they plan to provide. Dues need to reflect these costs.

Group Services and Activities may include:

- General Meeting
- Newsletter
- Website
- Special Interest Groups (SIGs)
- Shareware Library
- Training/Seminars
- Resource Library
- Fairs/Shows
- Help Lines
- Community Service
- Resource Center

After the services or activities are identified and costs are estimated, the projections are divided by the estimated number of potential members to determine the necessary dues to be charged. This needs to be reviewed on a regular basis as membership changes (up and down) in order to maintain solvency and where possible return the benefit to the members of an improving financial position.

### **Sponsorship**

Sponsors can be an essential asset to any Group, and each sponsor can contribute in various ways. Some sponsors may cover the cost of food for a meeting, others may provide giveaways or offer discounts on their products and services and some may wish to make a cash donation on an annual or quarterly basis in exchange for exposure to the membership, opportunities to present, etc.

Some Groups prefer not to have sponsors so that they are not perceived to have a bias towards a particular vendor or obligated to market their products at meetings. However, a sponsorship agreement with clear expectations can reduce the risks.

If your Group decides to allow sponsorships, there are a few questions to consider:

- What sponsorship levels will there be? How much money per level?
- What are the benefits provided per each sponsorship level?
- Will you allow exclusivity so that a sponsor does not worry about a competitor being promoted by your Group?
- Will "services-in-kind" be allowed in lieu of money?

### **Donations**

Many groups simply solicit donations from their members at each meeting to help cover food costs and possibly the room rental. Questions to consider when planning for donations:

- Is your Group setup as a not-for-profit that can accept donations and possibly allow members to write them off for tax purposes?
- Will you provide incentives or rewards for members that donate?

- How and when will donations be collected?
- Who will be responsible for tracking who donated what and how will it be tracked?

## **MEETING PLACE**

In choosing a meeting place, you will need to consider the following factors:

- Facilities
- Space availability
- Accessibility
- Consistency of availability

### **Facilities**

A typical meeting place should have the following facilities:

- Projection system
- Audio system (Microphone)
- Chairs for all attendees
- Whiteboard (Optional)
- Internet Connectivity for the speaker and possibly meeting attendees

### **Space Availability**

Your meeting place should have enough space to accommodate all the attendees. Overcrowding will only serve to discourage future attendance. Gauging attendee numbers for a meeting requires experience based upon attendance history, location, topic and speaker. Always provide full details of the meeting either via a registration link and/or website - for example if F&B will be provided or not.

Other things to consider around space availability include:

- The need for separate spaces for SIG meetings
- An auditorium or room big enough for main meetings
- An area to set up a stage and equipment for the speakers
- Room for computing labs

### **Accessibility**

A meeting place should be easily found.

Always ensure that a map to the meeting location is available online. Directions from local train stations / metro's and directions from major points of interest in the locality should also be mentioned.

### **Consistency**

It is usually best to try and ensure that the meeting place is available to you for long periods of time. Try to get a commitment that the place is available for several months to permit forward event/speaker planning, and ideally for free perhaps as part of a sponsorship agreement.

Ideally fix a single day of the month for your meeting if possible. For example, the 1<sup>st</sup> Tuesday of every month at 6:00 P.M. or the last Thursday of every month at 5:00 P.M. etc.. People like and respond to routine.

This attention to detail ensures that, in the future, members don't have to think about the meeting place or time.

### **Meeting Place Best Practices**

One of the easiest meeting places you can select when you first startup is the local Microsoft Office. They typically have a seminar room/lab which can be used. However, it is best to be forward thinking to account for membership and meeting size growth and the possibility that Microsoft may change their local policies. So always be on the lookout for a more permanent "home".

Other sources of meeting locations (some potentially free):

- Colleges
- Universities
- Companies in the area (perhaps sponsors)
- Churches
- Local schools
- Other non-profit organizations
- Movie theatres
- Cultural centers
- Seniors centers
- Libraries
- Hotels (some hotels offer discounts for non-profits – ask!)

Most of the above organizations have spare capacity. If you're able to help or allow their members to participate in the meetings they will in all probability assist you.

### **Food/Beverage Needs**

Many Groups provide food and/or beverages to attendees. Pizza and sub-sandwiches are very popular, but this can be very expensive as groups become larger. Things to consider:

- Can food and/or beverages (F&B) be served in the facility?
- Is it a requirement to use the F&B services associated with the facility?
- Where will the food area be set up?
- Where will people eat?
- How many attendees are expected per meeting?
- What food and/or beverages will be served?
- Will the food be picked up or delivered?
- Who will be responsible for setup?
- Who will be responsible for clean-up?

## **Audio Visual (A/V) Equipment Needs**

In addition to a computer, you will probably need an LCD projection display panel or projector, and a microphone. Other options may be a blackboard or flip chart, video player, or overhead projector. Make sure, well before the meeting, that the correct equipment and necessary electrical power will be available for your meetings and check the equipment to make sure that it is all in good working order! A blown projector bulb just before a meeting can be very embarrassing so keep a spare just in case.

## **Potential Meeting Locations**

When considering meeting place locations, make sure that the places you look at are easily accessible to the public (near regular transit routes and where the majority of your members work or live), and have the capacity for all of the items you determined in the previous points. Make sure that the meeting place you choose is comfortable and attractive, since this can influence the overall liveliness of the group.

## **EVENT MANAGEMENT**

There are a number of logistics that should be considered when planning for events/meetings.

### **Creating a Schedule/Agenda**

There are a few questions to ask when creating a standard schedule/agenda:

- How much time do you have available at the meeting place?
- Do you plan to have more than one speaker?
- How much time will you allocate to each speaker?
- Will you be serving food - seriously consider not serving food to save money?
- How quick is your sign-in process?
- Will you be giving away door-prizes and/or giveaways?

Your answers to these questions will help determine the agenda.

### **Choosing Possible Topics**

When selecting topics of discussion for your meetings, here are a few things to consider:

- Select a topic that can be adequately discussed within 1.5 to 2 hours. This is the average time for a presentation and you should allow for questions at the end.
- If possible select topics for the next 3 monthly meetings (monthly is a good time interval). This provides an opportunity to link similar topics together so that one topic will naturally lead into the next. It also provides some lead-time in lining up speakers.
- A poll of members can help identify hot topics they are interested in learning.

### **Finding Technical Presentations**

Finding new technical presentations on a consistent basis can be difficult. Things to consider:

- Most IT Pros much prefer technical presentations that have little or no marketing
- Technical presentations may also be available with voice-overs, which can be used in meetings
- Keep abreast of technical developments via newsletters, the internet, the local community and your members

## Finding Speakers

One of the principal requirements that Group members have is for quality speakers. Here are a series of recommendations to satisfy this requirement.

Anyone can be a speaker. Not to say that you should have just anybody speak at your meetings, just be aware that anyone can do it. A coworker might be an excellent speaker or possibly a client with whom you've been working.

Resources to use in order to find speakers

- Microsoft's User Group Support Services ([www.usergroupsupportservices.com](http://www.usergroupsupportservices.com))
- Find and get to know your local MVP's (Microsoft Most Valuable Professionals). The Microsoft MVP Program is an international recognition that identifies individuals from technical communities all around the world that share their passion for technology and community spirit. Microsoft MVPs are renowned for their practical experience and wish to share this experience with technical Microsoft communities. Find out more about the Microsoft MVP Program at <http://mvp.support.microsoft.com/>.
- Find and get to know your local MCT's (Microsoft Certified Trainers).
- People in the local community such as authors, university professors, small technology business owners, coworkers, clients, or even members of your Group are good candidate for speakers. While attending industry events or conferences, talk with the speaker(s) at the event and other participants to determine if they are willing to speak at one of your group's future meetings or events.

## DEVELOP A MARKETING PLAN

---

A good marketing strategy will help promote your Group within the community and grow your membership. Here are some questions to ask when developing a marketing plan:

1. Who and where are the target audiences?
2. What image do you want to portray to your target audience(s)?
3. What marketing channels are available?
4. How much money is available for advertising and marketing?

## CREATE AN ORGANIZATION IDENTITY

Take your time to select a name, logo and domain name for your Group (branding is important), but keep in mind that this is the way it will be known to the public and the rest of the community. Remember that an acronym might be the way that your group is referred to, and you may want to create something that is in line with your mission. If you use an acronym make it easy to remember and say. Also, remember that re-branding and all that it entails is even more difficult!

---

## Phase 3 – Development

Once the planning for your new group has been completed, you are ready to start the development of the services required by carrying out the steps documented in the project plans created in Phase 2.

### **EXECUTE THE MARKETING PLAN**

---

#### **CREATE A PUBLIC WEBSITE**

There are some people (very few these days) that do not feel a public website is needed or consider this a priority in starting a Group. However, a professional public website has several important benefits:

- Creates a public identity (“face”) viewed by the general IT Pro community as well as potential sponsors
- Helps to advertise upcoming events
- Provides a way for prospective members to find out more info and/or sign-up

Here are a few recommendations when creating a public website:

- **Use a FREE DNN web site provided by GITCA** – some restrictions apply
- **Use a professional web hosting provider** instead of putting the website on a server at a member’s home or office. Otherwise you risk losing your website if the member moves or decides to quit their job. You also have some fault tolerance if your site goes down. You may be able to obtain free hosting.
- **Set up email addresses/aliases for the Group.** They can be useful for people to obtain general information or other requests.
- **List upcoming meeting information (i.e. date, time, topic, contact info) and directions** to the meeting place.
- **Assign a person as the “webmaster”** responsible for managing all updates to the website. Ensure multiple people have admin access to the site and the knowledge to update and maintain it in case of emergency.
- **Allow members/visitors to post feedback and/or offer suggestions**
- **Consider using community portal sites** since they often have many of the popular collaboration tools already built-in. Popular online community sites include:
  - MSN Group Sites - <http://groups.msn.com/>
  - Yahoo Groups - <http://groups.yahoo.com/>
  - DotNetNuke - <http://dotnetnuke.com/> (the GITCA website is based on DNN)
  - PHP-Nuke - <http://phpnuke.org/>
  - Google - <https://sites.google.com/>
  - Microsoft - <http://www.microsoft.com/web/webmatrix/>

## DEVELOP MARKETING MATERIALS

Marketing materials, such as flyers, can help promote your Group and increase your membership. There are several types of marketing materials that an IT Pro Group should consider developing:

Marketing Material	Format	Description	Audience
Overview of the User Group	PowerPoint (10-15 slides)	This PowerPoint presentation provides an overview of the Group's mission and programs.	Prospective members Prospective sponsors
Benefits Flyers	PDF file (1-page)	This document provides a quick description of the benefits of joining the Group.	Prospective members Current members

## EXECUTE THE SPONSORSHIP PLAN

---

### CREATE A SPONSORSHIP AGREEMENT

A written agreement with a Sponsor is a contract that must be clear and precise. You should not write a Sponsor Agreement with the intent of "taking them to court" to force them to do something. That would be expensive and overall, useless. The Agreement should only lay out what is prudently expected by each side. If you are dealing with large corporations, be prepared to do it their way with their contracts and their lawyers. This is not bad and will save you some effort, but realize you can try to change anything you want and can always walk away before you sign. In reality, contracts are often broken just by one or both parties losing interest and walking away so make it possible to end the Agreement amicably.

Here is a list of items that should be included in each Sponsor Agreement.

- Company names, addresses, emails, and phone numbers.
- Authorization to use name and logo.
- Dates. Be very clear on Beginning date, Ending date, and Renewal capability.
- Terminations. How does each of you get out of the contract and with how much notice?
- Goods and/or services from the Sponsor.
- Services to the Sponsor.
- List Discounts to Group Members, if any
- List Rebates to Group, if any
- Describe Authorization method for insuring only Group Members participate
- Schedule for Reports/invoices/payments

Put in legal stuff if you like. It is like insurance; it is there only if things go wrong, which they might. Basic Legal clauses can include:

- Waiver of liability
- Confidential information
- Warranties

It is important that you understand the normal and usual way contracts are understood in your jurisdiction. Some are stricter than others. If you have never seen a contract or do not understand what you are doing, you should gather some professional legal advice. Perhaps a lawyer is not necessary to write your agreements because a boilerplate form exists, but you must realize the responsibility and realities of what you sign and agree to (see Directors/Officers insurance).

## **IDENTIFY POTENTIAL SPONSORS**

The best way to capitalize on any individual sponsor is to treat each one as a unique opportunity tailoring the relationship to yield the most satisfaction for each party. Securing a sponsor requires appropriate identification of possible sponsors, a thorough examination of your Group's needs, an understanding of your value to sponsors, a clear communication effort, and an honest assessment of the relationship.

### **1. Assess User Group's Needs**

The User Group must fulfill specific needs in order to function at the desired level. These needs may be found in the following list:

- Money to rent facility space
- Money to provide food for meetings - if necessary
- Speakers (and possibly money to pay for speakers and their T&E)
- Money to pay for liability insurance - some venues will require this
- Monetary and technology items (computer hardware, software, etc) to use for community involvement projects
- Discounts on local products and services to offer to Group members
- Free vendor products to be used as giveaways at meetings

### **2. Identify Potential Sponsors**

Generate a list of companies that can benefit your Group along with companies that can benefit from your Group. Companies that appear on both lists are the companies you should target in order to maximize the return for your efforts. The following are examples of companies that you can benefit from and may benefit from you:

- Computer parts resale shop
- Local computer technology chain store
- Local IT education and training centers
- Local bookstore / online bookseller / online retailer
- Local coffee shop
- Internet café
- Local ISP provider
- Recruitment companies
- Hardware and software providers

### 3. Define Value

Each sponsor will require some returned value for their generosity (ROI). Groups have value to offer the sponsor, and each sponsor needs to be examined independently as each one may require slightly different benefits. Some unique value-add propositions your Group can offer to various sponsors are outlined in the following examples:

- Awareness: Sponsoring the group will create awareness for the company.
- Exposure: Placing the sponsor's logo on the group's website, on a PowerPoint slide, on a newsletter and/or at the group's booth at local tech events, increases their exposure to the community.
- Access to influential professionals: Sponsors have a direct channel of communication to professionals who are influential within their peer groups.
- Generate excitement: A sponsor that provides an employee as a speaker has the opportunity to generate excitement for a new product or service.
- Increased business: Your Group members represent potential for an increase in traffic to the sponsor.
- Loyalty: The sponsor has an opportunity to gain loyalty among the Group members. The sponsor may offer exceptional service or products to the members, and gain loyal customers in the process.
- Community recognition: A sponsor may be looking for recognition within the community to foster a charitable image or to increase awareness and likeability throughout the local community. Your Group can offer that benefit.

## RECRUIT POTENTIAL SPONSORS

### 1. Initiate Communication with Potential Sponsors

Now that you have identified potential sponsors, understood your needs, and have projected the probable needs of the sponsor, you are ready to open the lines of communication. Remember to keep an open mind and listen carefully to their needs, and work up a solution to provide both parties with equal value.

### 2. Meet with Potential Sponsors

Once you are in communication with the potential sponsor and have provided an overview of your organization, meet with them along with one of your members to share your vision of what the Group will be in a few years and the impact it will have on the community. Be prepared to answer the following questions:

- How many registered members do you have now?
- How many new members do you forecast within the next 6, 12, and 24 months?
- What other sponsors do you currently have and/or are you pursuing?
- How much money do you need and what will the money be used for? (i.e. food, drink, room rental)

- Are there different sponsorship levels? What are they?
- What else do you need besides money?
- What type of advertising can they expect?
- Can they have access to your membership mailing list? Good business practice and privacy laws in most jurisdictions forbid this but be prepared to be asked, and politely refuse. This can be a deal breaker but you will know exactly the purpose of their engagement.

If you are already holding regular meetings with members, invite the potential sponsor to a meeting.

### **3. Close the deal**

- Close the sponsorship deal by having both parties sign the Sponsorship Agreement.
- Announce the new sponsorship at the next meeting and publicize locally within the community and perhaps the press. The sponsor may wish to do this anyway if appearing to be a good “citizen” is part of their motivation.

## **MANAGING SPONSOR RELATIONSHIPS**

If you have a good relationship with your sponsors, this will be natural and self-evident. However, usually, once a Sponsor Agreement has been signed, and goods or money received, the sponsor may no longer be top of mind. This is not good for a future relationship. A Group officer should be assigned to each Sponsor to build and maintain a personal relationship.

You must remember that the Sponsor has helped your Group because they want to help you. Make them feel appreciated and good about their decision. Make them feel respected and honored. When you invite them to a meeting (or if they are always there) make sure they are introduced and given special treatment. They deserve it. If you have lots of sponsors (good for you!) you may need to rotate the honors around. Don't forget them and always make them feel special.

Although each Sponsor Agreement is unique, try to give them more than you agreed to (under promise and over deliver). If you are providing advertising, give something extra. Write extra glowing articles about them in the newsletter and, with prior permission, write articles about personal achievements of your contacts or the company principals.

As in any business relationship, it is easier to keep one than to make one so work hard to make your Sponsor happy.

## **RECRUIT MEMBERS**

---

Just like beginning a new business, contact the people closest to you such as family, friends, professors, coworkers, students, etc.

There are many ways to recruit members, but don't forget about them after they join! Be sure to guide them towards the group's resources such as website, brochures, newsletters, etc. so they have a better feel for what your Group is about and the value to them. A mentor program may be a good way to welcome new members into the group, by having existing members in the group “show them around”. Some groups opt to give welcome kits.

If your Group will have membership dues, offer a free trial membership to people in the industry. You not only gain potential members, but you may establish a relationship with a future sponsor.

Participate in local events such as conferences, technology fairs, computer shows, or other IT events, and provide flyers or brochures about your Group to people assisting the events.

---

## Phase 4 – Deployment

### **CONDUCT MEETING**

---

Make sure that the topics to be discussed are interesting and educational for the majority of the group members. On occasion consider more than one topic per meeting to broaden the appeal. Effective presentations are fundamental for the influence of the Group. Make sure you collect information about the members of your group regularly. Consider including:

- "Questions to a panel of experts"
- Live presentations and audio visual conferences

### **MEETING ROOM SETUP**

---

Make sure well before the meeting that the correct equipment and necessary electrical power will be available for your meeting and make sure that all equipment will be in good working order.

### **SIGNING IN ATTENDEES**

---

There are a number of different ways that Groups sign-in attendees ranging from a sign-in sheet to a scanning system. Sign-in information can provide several benefits:

- Provides a way to forecast facility and food/beverage needs for subsequent meetings
- Can help track participation, which can be used in conjunction with an incentive program (i.e. extra raffle tickets)
- Provides statistics that can be used to show current and potential sponsors of the type of reach they can expect

### **CONDUCTING RAFFLES AND/OR GIVEAWAYS**

---

Raffles and giveaways are a great way to draw people into your meetings and increase membership. Here are a couple things to consider if you provide raffles and/or giveaways:

- Raffle off door-prizes can be used as an incentive to increase meeting attendance and subsequent group membership. If door-prizes are of doubtful value it can have the opposite effect. People should not be there simply to win prizes, or get fed for that matter, but don't just regularly give away worthless trinkets.
- Ask sponsors to provide door-prizes and giveaways to help provide them exposure to your members and their products
- When providing software make sure to indicate whether or not it is for resale. In most cases the software will be "not for resale" (NFR) and should be labeled accordingly. This is for the protection of the recipient, the vendor and the Group. Otherwise legal action may occur.

## CLEAN-UP

---

After a Group meeting, it is important to clean-up properly or risk losing the use of the facility. Things to consider:

- Designate a cleaning crew before the meeting
- Consider providing some type of “thank you” to the cleaning crew, such as an extra raffle ticket or a free giveaway
- Require Group officers to be part of the cleaning crew
- Create a clean-up checklist that is specific to your facility

## SUMMARY

---

The purpose of this document is to provide Group leaders with a starting point for creating a well-organized, focused, and well managed IT Professional Group. The hope is that any Group that is formed (or improved) as a result of reading this material grows to be a substantial and influential member of the community in which it resides. The main points to remember before beginning your journey are to:

- 1. *Envision***
- 2. *Plan***
- 3. *Develop***
- 4. *Deploy***

And just when you think that you have it licked go back to 1. and start over again, and keep doing that to ensure continuous improvement!

**To maximize your chances of success you should regard starting and running a Group as no different from starting and running a business enterprise. So business and leadership skills and experience are more important than technical skills. If you happen to have both then you are starting out with a clear advantage!**

If you follow this plan we believe that you will be well on the way to success!

**IF YOU HAVEN'T ALREADY DONE IT JOIN GITCA TODAY!**