

Barnsley networking group scoops two national awards

Word count: 868

A Barnsley networking group recently scooped two awards at a national ceremony for [The Growth Community](#). Nicky Thomas who founded the organisation three years ago arranged the awards to celebrate how far the community has grown.

There are now 14 groups with over 100 members across the UK. A handful of groups are online, but the majority are in-person meetings. The Barnsley group meet at The Business Village every other Friday and won **Group of the Year**. The Business Village was also the **Highly Commended Venue of the Year**.

“Good venues that recognise the benefit of being able to showcase themselves as well as support the local business community are harder to find than you might think. Most just want the room rate and miss the amazing marketing opportunity that is being offered to them. Thankfully, venues like The Business Village see the bigger picture. They get to gain whilst giving back to local businesses.”

Nicky Thomas – Founder of The Growth Community

The Barnsley group has seen rapid growth, and has a strong, positive community. To the outside, it appears a convivial way to network, with business taking place without pressure. The difference to other forms of networking is often cited, so we spoke to Nicky Thomas to find out more.

The Growth Community is all about people and relationships

“I build groups around humans, not categories and speak with all members before they join. I’m looking for ambitious people who have similar values and want to help others grow.”

Despite this, Nicky still keeps individual groups to single categories of business. She feels it makes a group more productive, but then encourages similar businesses to connect in the wider community. Her main aim is to provide an environment where people can build relationships. Part of her approach is to encourage members to help each other, and for them to become a business family.

All new members to The Growth Community go through an induction process. This helps them understand how things work and for them to become part of the whole community.

“We have a Facebook group and business directory which lists every member. I encourage people to get to know each other, even if they’re not in the same group. And that includes people doing the same kind of business. But I never tell people what to do. There are no leader boards, traffic light systems, or goals to achieve. Our members are adults and business owners, so I simply create an environment where they can thrive.”

Nicky has a maximum of 15 members per group so people can get to know each other. Guests can also attend meetings six times a year. But every third fortnight is for members only. This gives the opportunity for them to share their business goals with the people who can help them achieve them.

“I focus on humans and how they can work together. Once a group gets a buzz about it, they attract more people with the same energy. I never have to sell membership to anyone. But The Growth Community will only work for you if you’re growth minded and want to help other people be successful too.”

The Growth Community is totally different to other styles of networking

Mike Hardcastle, Director at [Novalead](#), is a member of the Barnsley group. He’s taken his experience from the corporate world and now provides sales, leadership, and quality training for SME’s.

“I’d always been part of large corporate organisations, so was new to networking when we started working with SME’s. I went to several networking events and was about to give up when I learned about a new group starting in Barnsley. It was totally different to the other style of meetings I’d been going to. There was no pressure or shaming you into getting leads. It was a nice experience with people going out of their way to help.”

Mike believes The Growth Community has found a format which attracts people with similar values.

“We all have each other's backs. There's always someone to ask for advice, or to run ideas by. Sometimes, it may just be to meet for a coffee and chat. Other styles of networking can be a waste of time because people feel obliged to give you leads which often come to nothing.”

Mike is currently working on a joint event with other members of the Barnsley group. Each of the collaborating businesses will share their expertise in a series of workshops aimed at SME's.

“I wouldn't have been able to arrange this event without The Growth Community. We collaborate, work together, and help each other. We also try and give each other business but it's not the main focus.”

Speaking with other members of The Growth Community, it's clear that many have also found a similar experience.

“Connecting businesses is a huge part of the work we do at The Business Village. So, we're delighted to host such a positive networking group where great relationships are being built. We're also thrilled that our support has been recognised by winning the Highly Commended Venue of the Year award.”

Kevin Steel, Business Development Manager, The Business Village

Find out more about The Growth Community:

<https://www.thegrowthcommunity.co.uk/>