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CNY Coffee Talk offers new networking opportunities

by Ryann Acton, Journal Staff

11/17/06: SYRACUSE — Tip clubs can be a useful source of business leads and contacts for Central New York professionals and business owners.

However, many tip clubs have strict rules and fees that can deter members from joining, says Daniel Canter, owner of “dcanter creative,” a design and marketing firm. This is why he created “CNY Coffee Talk,” a social-networking group for businesspeople in Central New York.

“The idea is [that] it’s a low-pressure tip club without having to pay an annual fee,” Canter, 37, says.

CNY Coffee Talk is unlike other area tip clubs, because it doesn’t follow any formal rules, Canter says. In fact, membership isn’t required for people to attend meetings. Those who attend CNY Coffee Talk’s monthly meetings don’t have to pay dues or fees, aren’t required to present or give tips, and aren’t penalized if they miss meetings, he explains. People can even attend meetings without participating and not get penalized, he adds. Some tip clubs require members to pay a small fee if they don’t have any tips to share with the group.

While there are no rules to tie participants to CNY Coffee Talk, Canter says this won’t negatively affect the group. The group’s informality will ensure its longevity because it can adapt to changes in size and structure, he explains.

Canter was a member of a local, 12-member tip club for two years. He declined to disclose the organization’s name. The tip club charged him a few hundred dollars in annual fees, he says. He left the club in July, because he wasn’t gaining valuable business leads.

While he enjoyed the social aspect of the club — the golf outings and the holiday dinners — Canter’s design firm didn’t benefit from the leads and contacts in the group, he says.

“The social benefit was great, but the business aspect wasn’t helping me,” he explains.

Canter also attended the Syracuse-area chapter TipClub, Inc., a social network for small- to medium-sized businesses. TipClub has 50,000 subscribers throughout the country, according to its Web site, www.tipclub.com. In 2005, the organization generated \$250 million in new business opportunities, the site says. The site launched in 1999 and incorporated in 2004. TipClub operates in Rochester, New York City, and McLean, Va., but operates chapters throughout the country.

TipClub members can access tips online for an annual fee, which is dependent on business size and can cost a couple of hundred dollars, he says. Canter didn’t like the idea of having to pay for tips that may not help him.

CNY Coffee Talk doesn’t charge its participants a fee, allowing small

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businesses and start-ups that can't afford fees to participate, he says. Meetings take place on the third Wednesday of each month at the Old Country Buffet located at 3179 Erie Blvd. in the town of DeWitt from 7:30 to 8:30 a.m. Participants are required to pay \$5 to cover the cost of coffee, pastries, and fresh fruit.

"None of the proceeds go to the group ... It's not a money-making entity. It's a business-making entity," Canter says. About a handful of people attended the organization's first meeting Oct. 22. The next meeting is scheduled for Nov. 15. Canter is promoting the meeting via media event listings and word-of-mouth.

Other structured tip clubs in Syracuse include the Tip Club of Syracuse, which was founded in 1972. The organization's rules include fees for members who come to meetings without tips and restrictions on members. Only one firm from each industry is allowed membership. Competing businesses are not granted membership.

TipClub, Inc. also has a Syracuse chapter that meets at the same Old Country Buffet in DeWitt that hosts CNY Coffee Talk meetings. While Canter doesn't like Tip Club, Inc.'s policy of charging members, he likes the social aspect of the venue.

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