

Just Add Hustle

Collaborate!

Partner with another business to bring in complementary skills.

Q MY GREATEST challenge is that it's only me. I need help executing my grand ideas. How can I get extra hands onboard without paying for them?

A: In a word: *collaborate*. By working with like-minded people and companies that serve the same audience you do, you'll benefit from each other's legwork. But you can also benefit by collaborating with competitors, which I'll get to in a minute. You each add staff (and potentially results) without having to hire anyone, which is a big plus.

Look to partner with complementary businesses in another industry. Hail Merry healthy snacks collaborates with Omni Hotels & Resorts to provide packs of its Vanilla Maple Almonds for guests who identify themselves to the chain as health-conscious travelers.

Guests appreciate that the hotel caters to their dietary preferences, and Hail Merry gets samples to a target audience. Leaving a small pack of almonds on pillows builds brand loyalty and future sales for both companies, says Hail Merry CEO Sarah Palisi Chapin, who calls the Dallas-based companies' collaboration "a perfectly wonderful relationship."

Another example: a gluten-free bakery in a strip mall provides a nearby children's shoe store with coupons for free mini-cupcakes. Each time customers buy shoes, they receive a thank-you gift coupon, a win-win for the store and the bakery.

Although collaborations between competitors might seem odd, they work well when executed properly. The following tips can be applied to product and service businesses that share a similar customer base.

1. Identify an ideal partner. Life coach Rachel Luna, a Marine Corps veteran whose husband is a Marine master sergeant, wanted to host events for military wives. She partnered with Nashawn Turner, an established coach with a strong record of seminar leadership, to host a program

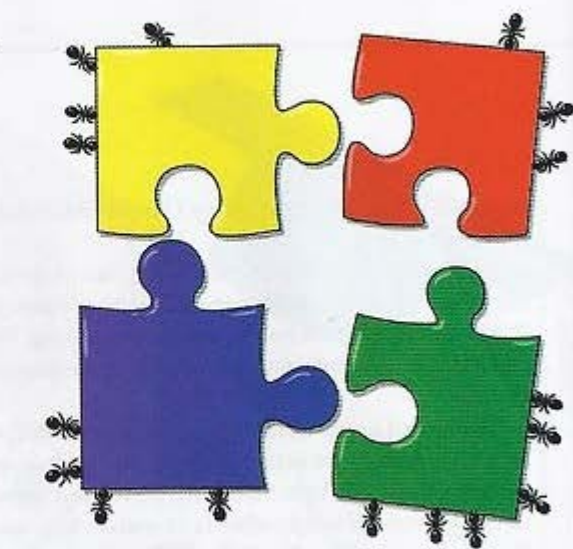


ILLUSTRATION: TOBY NORTON

that helped military spouses map out steps for reaching their business dreams.

"I needed someone who knew more than I did in terms of hosting events and the local community," Luna says. Working with Turner "gave me an instant endorsement and it increased visibility. And in me she got a military spouse who knows how to hustle."

2. Divide responsibilities. The women played to each other's strengths, which is key in any collaboration. "I contributed online marketing expertise because she is more old-school in terms of handing out fliers and relying on word-of-mouth," Luna says. "Nashawn leveraged her event-planning expertise to negotiate the venue fees, food and décor."

3. Execute with generosity. Both parties must feel the likelihood of a significant win in order to make this relationship work. Jointly planning the flow of the day gave both women the onstage spotlight for presenting sessions. Watching two perceived competitors work together showed the audience the benefits of collaborating, which was significant because many attendees feared competition from other military wives.

4. Connect frequently. Establish a realistic timetable and preferred method of communication to keep the partner informed. Twice a week, the two shared status updates and brainstormed on challenges and next steps to ensure the program goals were on track.

5. Review results to build on future opportunities. In addition to new clients for Luna and Turner, Luna says "attendees were able to walk into a space where dreaming was encouraged.... Many military wives say, 'I'll just follow my spouse until he retires, then I'll pursue my dreams—maybe.' This event forced them to say, 'I'm going to do something about my dreams today, no matter what.'" **S**



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