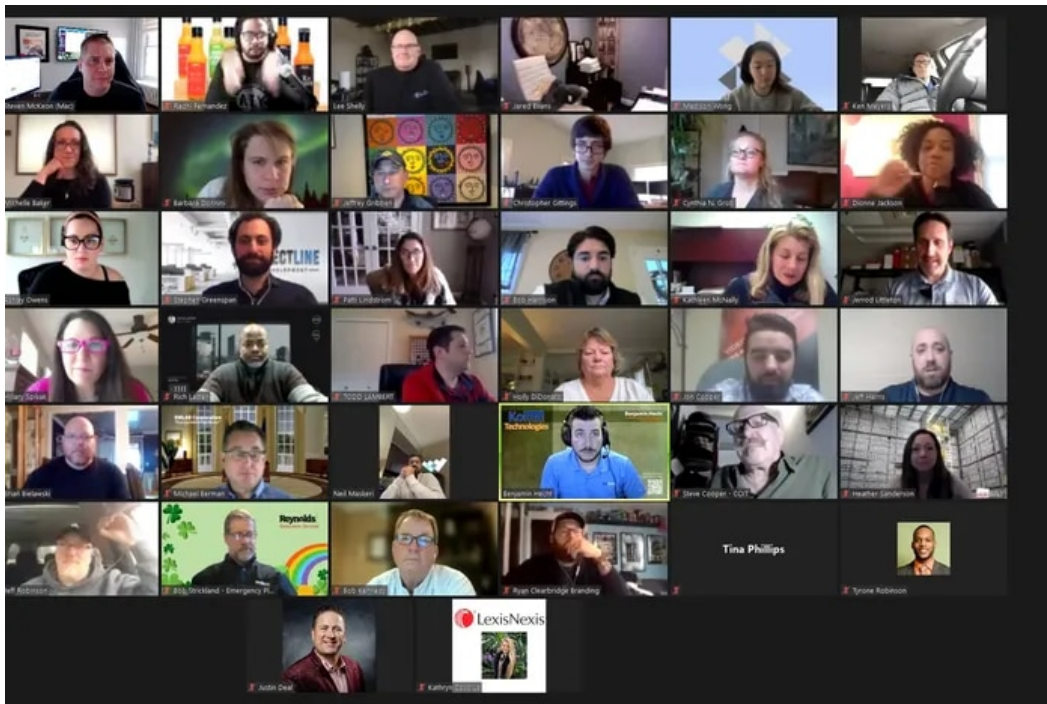


This zoom posse helps its 107 members navigate the pandemic for jobs and more

[inquirer.com/business/zoom-posse-pandemic-covid-jobs-sales-group-support-philadelphia-jersey-20210330.html](https://www.inquirer.com/business/zoom-posse-pandemic-covid-jobs-sales-group-support-philadelphia-jersey-20210330.html)

Future of Work

Ben Hecht created a small networking group that has mushroomed to 107 members and has found a way to replace much of the in-person networking that the health emergency took away.



Packed house X3. The faces of Best of the Best networking group [Read more](#) Steve McKeon

by Christine M. Johnson-Hall, For The Inquirer

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Soon after COVID-19 shut down many businesses last March, Ben Hecht looked around and wondered how he was going to cope.

An extrovert, IT expert and power connector who'd worked from home for a decade, Hecht had run a Business Networking International chapter for two years, was a member for four, and thrived on in-person networking lunches and events.

Faced with pandemic restrictions, Hecht created a small group from scratch “because, frankly, we all needed one and had nowhere to network since everything was shut down.” That group of six has grown into 107 “givers and doers” on the invite list. They quickly found that they had a lot to do.

Together, in an unprecedented year, the group has:

- Helped 10-plus people [find jobs](#).
- Generated untold sales leads.
- Raised funds with member James Corbett’s Project Refit — helping raise about \$30,000 for a family in need.
- Raised funds for Philabundance and the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society.

Who is this Zoom posse?

Many are owners of small- to medium-sized businesses based in New Jersey, Philadelphia or the Philadelphia suburbs, including a commercial electrical wiring pro, the [Famous 4th Street Cookie Co.](#), and former Phillie Phanatic David Raymond, now an author, keynote speaker and trainer at [the Power of Fun](#). There’s a subset of start-ups and fast-growing tech companies whose services range from providing thermal cameras for COVID-19 detection to launching apps, and managing cyber risk.

Not surprising in a virtual year, “IT has been a pivotal business trend,” said Hecht, a senior director of business development with [Kokua Technologies of Berlin, Camden County](#).

The group leaned into solving problems and sharing helpful tools. Many use Calendly, an app that tracks availability, sends reminders and integrates Zoom or Teams into invites, to manage their calendars.

Networking guru Ashley Owens recently introduced [Hio Hovr](#), a simple plug-in that brings websites to life by connecting site visitors for real-time gatherings. Owens, who runs networking business Ashley Assists, is also a relationship manager for Hio Social. She and Hecht shared some of their networking best practices in a recent interview.

When Hecht founded the group, Steve “Mac” McKeon, CEO of [MacguyverTech](#), a security, software and user experience company with offices in Philadelphia and Boston, was one of the original organizers who set simple rules: Hold virtual one-on-one sessions with each other, share connections when possible, and thank those who helped them.

“Our goal of the first few meetings was to bring one person from a new industry category that they personally considered to be the best at what they do,” Hecht recalled.

Each week, members give a 30-second “commercial” on their business, and two members each get to present for 10 minutes. All ask each other for introductions to business sectors they’d like to be connected to, through email, LinkedIn, and more. Unlike in-person networking, where members may take a few weeks and shared events to build a rapport, this gang started connecting immediately, thanks to the expectation of holding 30-minute calls or Zoom meetings to get to know one another.

Meetings are high-energy and surprising, as when one member joked about wearing “chum underwear in shark-infested waters.” Pop-up appearances by babies, children, and pets are celebrated.

Last year, they welcomed Philadelphia Union senior account executive T.J. Smink, who joined the group in June, weeks after completing chemotherapy for Hodgkin’s lymphoma.

“Ben might not know it, but I needed the group at the time,” said Smink, describing his pre-pandemic in-person networking schedule. “The Best of the Best gave me that sense of normalcy and was a huge help to me in getting back to my roots after my treatments were complete.”

As the group’s one-year anniversary approached, members of BotB praised Hecht and their colleagues.

“Not only have I met amazing new people, but I have learned so much from Ben and the other power connectors involved,” said Heather Sanderson, business development manager at DocuVault in West Deptford.

Eve Pappas, vice president of corporate sales for Hoffman’s Exterminating of Cherry Hill, said of Hecht: “You could call him our GM — to make the talent flourish.”

“Everybody shows up to help someone,” said Hecht, who was searching for a job himself when he started the group. He eventually landed his current role at Kokua last summer while garnering wholehearted support from his boss, Jeff Platt, to run with his idea.

“This group has provided resources, introductions, support, and knowledge to not only generate powerful leads, but has significantly improved the reach of my network,” said Owens. “The compassion and empathy from Ben Hecht is 100% the reason why this group is successful. Between his organization, candor, and overall giver mentality, it is by far the best networking group I have ever had the pleasure of being a part of.”

High praise from a professional networker.

Ashley Owens’ and Ben Hecht’s virtual networking tips

From Ashley, networking concierge

- Identify the top 10 industries that would complement your business and become strategic partners. Network with people that you can get to know, and like — professionals you would share clients with.
- Research groups and communities that serve these kinds of industries and join them to collaborate, share leads, share passions and knowledge.
- Organize your “A” team. Grab a list from LinkedIn of all the identifiable types of industries and put them in an Excel file. When you see the word marketing, whom do you think of? Put their names in the second column. When you see the industry name real estate, who’s the first name you think of? And so on. These are the people you know, like, and trust.
- Recognize Zoom fatigue and adjust accordingly. Not every new call has to be on camera. Identify the first call as a get-to-know you call and cap it at 15 to 20 minutes. If it’s the right kind of connection, set up a meeting as a Zoom one.

Ben’s networking words to live by:

- Stop selling.
- Be selfless and helpful to everyone.
- Meet with everyone you can and treat them all the same.
- Put good people together when it feels right.
- Don’t hesitate to make introductions.
- Be there for everyone.

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