

Women Entrepreneur Guest Blogger

On the ground with women entrepreneurs

\$15.5 Billion Aggregate Revenue; 23,000 Years of Experience

By: Hilary Kaye | 04/23/2010

[Print](#) | [Share This](#) | [Post a Comment](#) | [Get the Mag](#) | [Weekly Updates](#) | [\[-\] Text Size \[+\]](#)

Day One was rich with experiences; where do I begin? First, I have to share a few stats that blew me away. President and founder Marsha Firestone led the opening session and gave a quick overview that should convince anyone that women business owners are not to be taken lightly.

The WPO group grew 5 percent in 2009, a bit surprising considering the poor economy. There are now 89 chapters on four continents. The average WPO member's gross [revenue](#) is \$13 million, with \$15.5 BILLION aggregate revenue. Member companies average 93 employees, with an aggregate 107,000 employees. The average WPO member has 21 years' experience in business; all told, the group has 23,000 years of experience.

I heard these stats and looked around me. I can feel the power in my own WPO group in Orange County, Calif., but we can all fit around a conference room table. The power in this packed ballroom was almost vibrating! Hooyah!

I started Day One with two focus groups. They were interesting, but just light appetizers leading up to the main course. I decided to check these out to meet some of the WPO members in a smaller setting. Plus, the two topics, [retirement plans](#) and social media, were both relevant to me. The participants were from all over the country--Ohio, Oregon, Texas, Utah, Connecticut, New York, Pennsylvania, Illinois and California. A pretty good cross section.

First up--a session for [Principal Financial Group](#), whose facilitator probed to uncover our thoughts and feelings about the retirement plans we offer our [employees](#). Not sure if the PFG folks got much out of our conversation, but the eight of us around the table walked away surprised that ALL of us are unhappy with our providers or our plans, for one reason or another. Interesting! I'm not alone. And it gave me some food for thought.

Second focus group, on [social media](#), was by [American Express OPEN](#). Interestingly, I seemed to be the elder statesman (woman?) and tried hard (but didn't succeed) not to hog the conversation.

I'm not an expert, but in this group I sure was. My fellow participants were company presidents/CEOs who, for the most part, were resisting the urge to tweet, blog or otherwise communicate socially for their companies. Their biggest stumbling block? Time. "Who has time for all of that?" they mourned. The discussion was fascinating to me, since my company is fully engaged in social media, both for our PR agency and for our clients.

Truthfully, the women around the table sounded an awful lot like some of our clients who are struggling to "get it" and need hand-holding to understand the benefits. I hope AmEx got what it needed from us; I know I got some new insights into how to help the CEOs we work with ease into the brave new world of social media.

AmEx OPEN also gave us a prototype of a social media guide it plans to begin using, asking us for feedback. The group gave good insights (i.e., include an example from a service provider, not just a retailer, since the retail/social media connection is much easier to grasp). I actually thought the guide was quite good. [AmEx OPEN](#) is on the right track--but then, if AmEx can't get it right, who can?

I have to dash off to Day Two activities, but more to come on yesterday's main course, the amazing keynote speaker, professor Neeli Bendapudi from Fisher College of [Business](#), Ohio State University. She knocked our socks off yesterday. I can't wait to share some of her thoughts about consumer behavior and the consumer experience, such as her views on our companies' "apostles" and "terrorists." If you've got more terrorists than apostles out there, look out!