



## The Ladies Who Latte Story

Frustrated by the cost, membership and limitations of the timings networking, one afternoon Sharon Connolly drafted an email to about 30 women she'd previously met at networking events to see if they just wanted to have an informal coffee without the cost, agenda or speaker and without it taking out a whole chunk of their day. Without giving it any thought she titled the email "lets be Ladies Who Latte" and with that simple email she had the accidental conception of Berkshires biggest networking success in 2007

Like most successful ideas a very simple one. Ladies loved the concept and one by one new groups were formed. After one year there were over 700 ladies on the mailing list who meet on a regular basis. LWL has never been advertised, our business had grown by word of mouth and is stretching far and wide. At present we operate in 24 areas along the M4 corridor and it expanding all the time – even internationally.

There are a lot of excellent networking concepts currently available to women, and some, like LWL are aimed specifically at women. Mostly they revolve around lunches, and breakfasts. As a working mother Sharon Connolly felt that there were no groups that were friendly to entrepreneurs who were mums. And whether or not you are a mum, if you are starting out in business the joining fees to most groups could be prohibitive. So LadieswhoLatte bridged the gaps.

No one competes with what we have to offer - we are child friendly – during the school holidays Latte groups still run and the children are welcome - we are local - we meet at a mum friendly hour, usually 10am in the morning and above all else – the meetings are free.

Our Leaders are very special ladies. Their business is supporting women who would like to start their own business -no matter how small, and offer friendship, advice, contacts and business leads. People do business with

people they know and women are such great communicators - there is no problem getting down to business as soon as you arrive and meet all others in the group. You can chose to have a 'round the table' chat and introduce yourself to everyone attending, or just move around groups which seem to form naturally. Venues range from coffee bars to hotels and restaurants. We have been welcomed everywhere, after all we are bringing business into some places at a very quiet time of day. All the ladies have to do when they turn up - is purchase their own coffee and join in, it is as simple as that.

Larger companies are beginning to approach us with special offers for days out and discounts, all of which are being passed on to our members.

One year after it's conception Sharon asked "Networking Queen" Mary Flavelle to hop on board and assist with the running and promoting of the organization which continues to thrive, and grow.

We have amazing success stories of women making connections and being given opportunities that they never could have dreamed of finding on their own.

We are women with imagination, drive, enthusiasm and hope and we are enjoying sharing out success becuas

*It's no good being fabulous on your own*



Sharon Connolly and Mary Flavelle

## Starting a Latte Group

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I'm delighted that you are interested in starting a Latte group. Before we start you off with a group here is some more information about what you need to do to launch a group and about the commitment that we need from you before you decide to go ahead.

First, and most importantly. If you think you might make some money by hosting a latte meeting then best to stop reading now because we don't pay you, you don't earn any commission you're in it for the LOVE...and it's also a great way to promote yourself and your business but that's it.

Secondly can you commit the time. There is no contract but if you decide to start a group we'd really like you to be able to commit one morning a month for a year.

Still reading.....great

## What happens at a Latte Meeting?

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Normally running from 10am – 12.30pm a latte meeting is an informal gathering of women who want to network. Although most of them will run their own business we also attract corporate employees, people thinking of starting a business, and even some retired ladies just there for a cuppa. Numbers attending vary dramatically as few as 5 or as many as 60. A larger group is not necessarily more successful, smaller groups often create deeper relationships in the groups.

Depending on the number of attendees and the venue *sometimes* the visitors do a *one minute* introduction talk but as visitors don't all turn up at the same time, and sometimes leave early sometimes it's a bit difficult to facilitate this. Mostly ladies turn up and are simply welcomed into the group and start doing what women do best...chatting. A leader should make sure that new visitors are introduced to regular visitors and facilitate introductions where necessary but the meetings generally run themselves.

Our concept, and our success, has been to focus on keeping it really simple. You don't have to book in. Meetings are free. We never have a speaker. We never stipulate what time you must arrive, or how long you must stay. The choice of venue and the layout should also always make it easy for networkers to move and meet many contacts with ease....and that's it.

## What makes a good leader?

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We have leaders from all sorts of businesses but what ever they do they have a passion to help and connect other women. A latte leader needs to already be an experienced networker. Whilst we will promote new meetings on our website, and spread the word as a leader you already need to be attending about 3 different networking groups such as Chamber of Commerce, BNI, Athena on a regular basis. You must already have a database of about 50 women, friends or business contacts to start with. If you want to start a group **you should feel confident that you would attract about 10-15 visitors to your first event** to generate a good atmosphere.

## What do you need to do set up a group?

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If you feel that you have the contacts and the passion to set up a group then the next step is to find the location. Ideally somewhere easy and free to park. Remember we want our ladies to be able to easily pop in without worrying if they've got change, or cutting an interesting conversation short because their ticket will run out.

Latte meetings can get quite large so think about how 50 ladies would fit into your new venue. 50 nattering ladies can be very loud so is there an area that you can "take over". Also think about how long it takes to get served a coffee. Will the venue give you a dedicated server? Would you have to queue to get coffee? Does the layout of the place make it easy for your guests to move around? Some of our venues provide coffee on an "honesty" basis. They leave fresh coffee pots and biscuits out and ladies donate a couple of pounds at the meeting. Some venues even give coffee

for free, or free refills. Once you have chosen a location speak to the manager and confirm the arrangements.

## Timing of Meetings?

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We have meetings every day of the week so the choice is yours really. Do however look at any other meetings that are close by. We have meetings that are geographically very close, but they run weeks apart. Look at the list of Latte groups in your area and choose your date to compliment what is already on offer. DO speak to latte leaders in your geographical area. We all work together, never in competition so make sure you are complimenting your latte neighbours.

## The Website

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You will need to create yourself a profile on the LWL website [www.ladieswholatte.rsitez.com](http://www.ladieswholatte.rsitez.com) once you have created your profile you can set up an online group. This is very simple to do. You should name your group – Your Location and Group – e.g. **Maidenhead** Group. The **Group picture should be a photograph of you** – a good headshot so your group can recognise you. If you already know members from the LWL site then you can ask them to “join” your group online. Use your regular email and word of mouth to promote your group initially. During your meetings you must **encourage all visitors to sign up to the site** and join your group. It will be the easiest way for you to communicate with all your attendees. It is also the only way that they will receive all the Latte news. User guides for leaders and members are under development. The website is currently free as well as advertising on the site, which currently reaches 1100 members.

## Your Launch

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Press and Media are very interested in LadiesWhoLatte. We have a press release that you can obtain from Mary Flavelle ([mary@maryflavelle.com](mailto:mary@maryflavelle.com)) that we recommend you send to local radio and newspapers announcing your launch. Check out websites that feature networking events and “whats on” in your area. Being a LadiesWhoLatte leader is a great way for you to create relationships with the local media which will in turn benefit your business and also the members of your group.

Once you have told us your dates and venue we will publicise your meeting on the website and promote it to the other members. Where-ever possible at least one existing experienced leader will come and support you on the day. Email the dates of your meetings for the next 6 months to [Sharon@maximisegroup.com](mailto:Sharon@maximisegroup.com). Dates do change – school holidays etc so please keep us informed if you need to change the date.

## The Actual meeting.

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The day has arrived and you are going to host your first latte meeting.

Arrive early at the venue to welcome your guests. Simply introduce yourself and then introduce your guests to each other and to be honest the rest will take care of itself. The actual format of meetings does vary – in a smaller meeting it may be appropriate for each guest to give a one minute introduction. Some of your larger meetings allow 3 pre-arranged short introduction sessions each month and those who have spoken donate a raffle prize. Exactly how you run your meeting will depend on the number of guests and the venue. It’s just imperative that it stays informal and people get the chance to do what they are there for which is to network, not to listen to 30 one minute presentations.

As mentioned previously you should encourage visitors to sign up for the website and to join your group to receive continued communication. You may also like to collect business cards and create your own database outside the latte site, that is up to you.

## After the meeting

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If you have collected a list of names then email them through to me at [Sharon@maximisegroup.com](mailto:Sharon@maximisegroup.com) and I can enter their details into the site and send them a reminder to join. Some of our leaders create brilliant newsletters and distribute them after the meetings but it's not a pre-requisite.

## Getting Support

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All our leaders run their own businesses and during busy times running your latte meeting can be quite a commitment. We recommend that you enlist a "2<sup>nd</sup>" leader so that if you are unable to make a meeting at short notice then someone else can take the reigns for you. A number of leaders also share the responsibility with a colleague.

If after reading all of this then you're still raring to go then welcome aboard!

## Application to Start a Ladies Who Latte Group

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Name :	
Email Address:	
Telephone Number	
Tell us a about yourself.....	
Occupation :	
Your Website:	
Number of Years in Business:	
Networking Groups currently attended:	
Area Requested:	
Suggested Venue:	
Groups you have already attended:	
Why do you want to host a latte event?	
Suggested Date of First Meeting	
Meeting recurrence – eg Third mon of month,	
Any other comments:	