

*We Trade Network* – first published in the Fall 2007 issue of *Three Rivers Lifestyle*

The typical American business offers its products and services in exchange for money. Everyone knows that. But what if businesses could buy and sell without money?

That's right, no money. I'm not being cute here; no money means no cash, no checks, and no credit cards.

Have you heard of business-to-business barter? No? Well, here's how it works. You join a trade network that consists of a great many members. Among themselves, the members of the trade network sell their products and services in exchange for the products and services of other members. Do you hire a janitorial service? Why pay cash? Trade for it. Want to give employee benefits to your employees? Trade for them.

Yes, it's that simple. Let's say you're a florist. You join the We Trade Network and open an account. When another member of the network visits your shop to order flowers, instead of accepting a cash payment from him, you fill out a voucher and submit it to the network. Let's say the flowers cost \$100. He walks off with his flowers and you have a balance of \$100 in your trade account.

Okay, you don't want to be a florist. How about a carpet cleaner? Same scenario: a client wants to do business with you. Instead of paying you \$500 in cash to clean his carpets, he banks those trade dollars in your account when you submit your voucher to the network.

Now, let's say you need new business cards. It doesn't have to be the same day the fellow purchases the flowers or has his carpet cleaned. In fact, most of the time it won't be the same day. Anyway, you purchase your business cards from a network member, a printer. Instead of paying \$85 for your business cards, you give him the information necessary to fill out a voucher that he submits it to the network. You walk off with your business cards and he has eighty-five more dollars in his trade account. You now have a credit balance of \$15 in your account--if you're a florist. If you're a carpet cleaner, you have a credit balance of \$415. And so it goes.

Karen Welch, president of the We Trade Network, says the idea of business-to-business barter first emerged in Switzerland in 1934. Right now, she estimates, seventy-

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five percent of all Switzerland's business-to-business deals are transacted through barter, otherwise known as "banking trade dollars." The idea didn't cross the Atlantic Ocean until 1960. Karen has been involved in the trade industry since 1992 and founded the We Trade Network in Polson in 2000. The simplest way to explain the process to a business owner, she says, is to ask, "When purchasing something you need for your business, do you want to pay with cash or with product from your shelf?"

What can a trade network do for you? It can enhance your business, for example, through advertising or employee benefits. It can also enhance your personal lifestyle. Here are some of the services the We Trade Network provides to its members: a) electronic management of all barter and trade dollars, b) invitations to prospective members to join the network and fill the needs of existing members, c) advertising all member businesses locally and advertising nationally for businesses that sell something that can be shipped, d) electronic availability of all transactions and statements, 24/7, f) required reporting of members' sales to state agencies and the IRS on form 1099B, g) online and print directories of all members, h) marketing assistance for both sales and purchases. The We Trade Network is a member of the National Association of Trade Exchanges and the International Reciprocal Trade Association.

Let's say you'll be travelling to Europe on business. The We Trade Network will contact its European associates to help you trade for hotel accommodations. Because of its trade affiliations in Spokane, Calgary, and New Zealand--to name just a few, the We Trade Network opens the doors to your business in ways your local marketing and advertising campaigns simply cannot do.

The ideal prospect for business-to-business barter is a firm that has plenty of room for new business growth and has a good profit margin. Karen's experience indicates that both retail and service businesses prosper when "banking trade dollars." But what kinds of businesses are you talking about? you want to know. Here are a handful of examples: Art Galleries, Automotive Trades, Caterers, Consultants, Furniture Stores, Home Decorators, Massage Therapists, Mortgage Lenders, Photographers, Property Managers, Restaurants, Video Rental Stores, and Window Cleaners. For a more comprehensive list of the We Trade Network's membership, visit their web site at [www.wetradenetwork.com](http://www.wetradenetwork.com).

Of all the types of businesses Karen discussed, the one that stands out most vividly in my mind is the one who uses the trade dollars in his account to provide

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wellness benefits for his employees: massage therapy, chiropractic treatment, and routine dental care. There is no end to the possibilities when participating in business-to-business barter!

For more information, call the We Trade Network toll free at 877-700-8723 or visit its web site at [www.wetradenetwork.com](http://www.wetradenetwork.com).