

## in touch with | jeff nischwitz ■ 3 guys

PHOTO BY LINDA FORD



From left to right, 3 Guys Present founders David Akers, Jeff Nischwitz, and Bob Aber.

Jeff Nischwitz, safe to say, likes to help local entrepreneurs. During the day, the attorney with Cowden Humphrey helps clients with their business issues and growth strategies. On many nights, as one of the founders of the networking group 3 Guys Present, he's at it again, encouraging area professionals to strive for excellence. CBC asked him:

**Q** Who are the "3 Guys?"

**A** We get this question all the time, and our answer is simple: It's just three guys (Jeff Nischwitz, David Akers, and Bob Aber). We all have different jobs and networks (although there's some overlap), but we're all committed to building relationships and making a difference in the region. The three of us came together to create a networking model focused on relationships, unique events, and interesting people.

**Q** What is "3 Guys Present" and its purpose?

**A** 3 Guys Present is essentially an umbrella concept that presents unique opportunities for people to gather and grow

relationships and create positive change for Cleveland and the region. The People You Should Meet quarterly networking events have one basic objective: bringing together various networks of great people to meet each other, extending and expanding relationships across Northeast Ohio. And it's working. As one attendee observed, "I've never seen so many truly good people in one place. This group of people is going to change the region."

**Q** What goes into planning the event?

**A** Like other events, it starts with planning and lots of organization — at least for the first several events — but as we've presented more events (we just celebrated our one-year anniversary with our fifth event on Jan. 13), we've systematized the process. We have a Web site ([www.3guyspresent.com](http://www.3guyspresent.com)) and utilize [www.eventbrite.com](http://www.eventbrite.com) for our invitation, reservation, and payment process. We're expanding our data capabilities to better manage the invitee and attendee information, and we continue to build in processes around everything

that we do, from location decisions, to food arrangements, to updates regarding our featured young entrepreneurs. Thus far we've primarily relied on ourselves for the planning and production of the events, although we have to give credit to our technology partner (Dan Valerian and Valerian Consulting) and our pre-event right hand, Jani Memorich.

**Q** Why different venues?

**A** While some groups and organizations host events at different locations, they tend to be the same small group of locations. We decided to host our events at unique Northeast Ohio locations to expose people to places that they may not have visited or perhaps even heard about. There are so many terrific places to see in Northeast Ohio, but too many of us have ignored or forgotten them. Our first five events were held at the Hermit Club, Grays Armory, Shooters on the Water, the Bang and Clatter Theatre, and the Union Club, and typically responses from attendees included "I've never heard of this place," "I've never been here before," or "I haven't been here in 15 years."

**Q** Please explain the E-CITY connection?

**A** As we developed the 3 Guys concept, we made a decision that, if we're going to bring together good people for some fun, interaction, and relationship building, we should do some good at the same time. That's why each event has a young entrepreneur — graduates of E CITY's entrepreneurship program ([www.ecitycleveland.com](http://www.ecitycleveland.com)) — as the beneficiary, and a portion of our proceeds are donated to the young entrepreneur (typically aged 16-18) to use in his or her business. Our attendees also get to meet these budding entrepreneurs in the region, and we also have previously featured entrepreneurs work our events to give them ongoing exposure to the people of Northeast Ohio.

**Q** Explain the name-tag "question"?

**A** One of our fundamental commitments is to make the People You Should Meet

events different and meaningful, which led us to have some "twist" (something different) for each event. We put attendee answers to the twist questions on their name tags, which stimulates conversations around much more than where you work and what you do. By the way, we don't put companies on name tags, which causes the conversations to start with the person, not with where someone works or what they do. We want our events to be about building relationships with people rather than networking to get a deal or a sale.

**Q** How do you promote the event?

**A** This is one truly unique aspect of our events. For the first event, the 3 Guys created a list of "interesting" people; people that we know, trust, and believe are making an impact for their organization, for the community, or for the region. We

then invited each invitee to invite one other "interesting" person, which we've repeated for each event. Once you attend a People You Should Meet event, you're on the invite list for future events, and for each event the invitees are encouraged to invite one other "interesting" person. Thus, our invitees and attendees promote the events. Our events are not open to anyone, and you can't simply get on the invitation list or just "come" to an event. You must be invited by someone that's already invited, which results in our events being the highest quality networking events in Northeast Ohio.

**Q** Is it working?

**A** After five People You Should Meet events, the concept is working. We continue to get new people to our events (typically 40 percent of our attendees

are first-time attendees), attendees are focused on meeting other interesting people in an open and supportive networking environment, relationships are being built, young entrepreneurs are being nurtured, and business is being done. We regularly hear of new business being generated among attendees, of people and resources getting connected, of new jobs being secured, and of attendees leaving full of positive energy and new connections. One attendee of our most recent People You Should Meet event wrote this in his blog:

*I really, really, don't like networking events and tend to avoid them like the plague. ... With over 100 people attending and everyone mixing it up with everyone else, it was the best networking event I have attended. □*

For more information: [www.3guyspresent.com](http://www.3guyspresent.com).

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