

Top 10 Things Tampa Bay Entrepreneurs Should Do in 2012

by Danielle Weitlauf

1. *Participate in a camp* - [IDEA Camp](#), [Health Camp](#), [Bar Camp](#)....The camps are in-depth and affordable sessions that can help you network as well as discuss and even vet your idea.
2. *Drop in on a [Meetup](#) group and/or membership organization of fellow entrepreneurs and industry professionals.* This is a great way to network and learn from other entrepreneurs. Tampa Bay Innovation Center conducts a monthly mentoring meetup, [StartUp Xchange](#). In addition, there are a wide variety of industry meetups including those organized by [Tampa Bay Technology Forum](#), [Tampa Bay WaVE](#), [Florida Federal Contractors Association](#), [Florida Medical Manufacturers' Consortium](#) and [BioFlorida](#).
Whatever your interest may be, you can find a group!
3. *Network, network, network.* In addition to Meetup groups and membership organizations, there are many other opportunities to connect with other innovators and entrepreneurs. Each year, TBTF's [TECH Jam](#) raises money to prepare Tampa's at-risk youth to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering and math. Beyond being for a great cause, it allows participants to network with more than 600 local professionals. In addition, [TECH Talk](#), hosted by the Innovation Center, is a free monthly breakfast, networking and education event specifically geared to the interests of the Tampa Bay area's innovation and technology entrepreneurship communities with a different speaker each month.
4. *Get out of the house and try coworking!* Coworking is the process of sharing a workspace in the community and often includes amenities for participants like meeting space, coffee, Wi-Fi and plenty of room to work. It's become a growing trend for

entrepreneurs and provides an affordable alternative to a home office. The Tampa Bay Innovation Center has the [Launch Lab](#) in mid-Pinellas and Tampa Bay WaVE recently opened a location in downtown Tampa. [Click here](#) for a one day pass to work at Tampa Bay Innovation Center's Launch Lab before Feb. 28.

5. *Utilize local organizations and resources.* The [Small Business Development Center](#) offers classes designed specifically with startups in mind. [Incubators](#) are a great and affordable resource for entrepreneurs and can give them access to resources beyond what they might identify on their own. Both the [Tampa Bay Innovation Center](#) and the [University of South Florida](#) provide incubation and education programs designed to build successful local companies.
6. *Find a good mentor.* Mentors play a significant role in helping develop your venture. Many of the activities on this list can help you connect with potential mentors. In addition, incubators such as the Tampa Bay Innovation Center offer more formal mentoring programs for their clients, connecting them with successful business executives and other professionals who are volunteering their time to support entrepreneurs, whereas networking events can provide informal opportunities to seek out a new mentor.
7. *Cover all your bases.* From accounting to intellectual property to corporate structure to market research and social media, it's important to understand where these fit into your business plan. Be sure to check the [U.S. Patent and Trademark Office's website](#) when considering names for your business to make sure they aren't already taken. Review the [SBA's list](#) of business structures and tax implications for each one when establishing your business. Then consult your attorney for a more definitive recommendation.

8. *Meet with clients in person.* Your office, whether it is at home or another location, can become quite comfortable and we often forget the value of meeting with customers face to face. Be sure to regularly touch base with clients, make frequent phone calls and plan semi-annual or quarterly meetings.
9. *Get your venture funded.* There are various options for funding your startup, including personal financing, friends & family, angel investors, venture capitalists and everything in between. Entrepreneur.com offers an [Investment ROI calculator](#) for those offering a stake in their company in exchange for funding. Locally, the [Florida Venture Forum](#) hosts an Early Stage Conference each fall to showcase early stage, high growth private companies before a national audience of investors.
10. *Make time for yourself and your family.* Take a day to enjoy the [beaches](#) or one of the other great amenities the bay area has to offer. Time off will help you re-energize and re-focus, which is essential for all entrepreneurs.