Serving as the sole marketing expert within a small business can feel isolating—no team with which to share the workload, banter about ideas or talk shop. When the marketing leads for three Southern California technology solution providers found themselves in that position, they turned to their companies’ peer-to-peer community, Trust X Alliance, for help.

“I had experience working in online advertising, but I wasn’t experienced in general event and email marketing in the technology industry,” recalls Kristen Kerler, who oversees marketing for Data41. “I really felt like I was starting at ground zero.” Meanwhile, Alexandra Gonzalez, TechMedics, and Maddie Malone, Aurora IT, faced similar challenges. Even after getting involved in the Trust X Alliance marketing think tank, the women were looking for more face-to-face opportunities to share work experiences.

Because all three executives work with companies in the Trust X Alliance Pacific West chapter, they decided to take the think tank group experience and go much deeper by arranging local lunches. “When we take time to meet in person—over lunch or even within the bigger Trust X events—we can talk about the roles we play and what we’re doing at a whole different level,” says Kerler. “It’s a very open conversation when we sit down to lunch. That has really helped nurture our relationships.” Malone agrees. “It can be hard to get opinions out in a larger group. Face-to-face makes it so much easier to talk openly about challenges and needs that are immediate to you; it’s a very effective way to uncover what works for me individually and for our company. It has really evolved into more of a mentoring relationship.”

The marketing leads use this new, deeper connection to explore best practices: social media, event planning, email service providers, website do’s and don’ts, vetting contact lists and company policies—to name a few. “Instead of going through trial and error to find the right solution, all I have to do is make a call or have a meeting with people who are in my role and in my industry,” explains Gonzalez, adding that it’s great to save someone else from time-consuming research and experimentation. “My first Trust X meeting was two years ago, and there weren’t many marketing leads there. Now, we have this face-to-face time that has helped us build a relationship where we can pick up the phone and lean on each other.”

All three executives say their company leadership pushed them to become involved with Trust X, confident that marketing partnerships were there if they took a little time to dig. “Our CEOs kept telling us, individually, to reach out to other members. We found that company leaders are willing to make introductions to their marketing leads, and that is so helpful,” says Kerler, who encourages marketing leads within other chapters to connect outside the formal Trust X events and live the example of sharing best practices, which are so foundational to the community. “I think it comes down to the way Trust X promotes idea sharing; that philosophy has taken root and now our CEOs want to push it down through their teams. It really is a great opportunity for us, and I’m glad we took advantage of it.”