

"Marketing and the Club Newsletter"

In the mid 70's I was a young assistant just starting out in the club business. How to increase readership of the club newsletter was one of the problems frequently discussed by managers. In the past 25 years a more astute management team benefiting from technology innovations have enhanced the industry's ability to offer higher quality publications. If the education and tools are there to do a better job why are we still bemoaning the same problem of how to get a greater percentage of members to read the newsletter? The answer lies in our management priorities.

Corporations have played a major roll in the expansion of the club industry. Unlike private member-owned clubs, corporations make marketing a high priority as they try to sell their products. Only recently have private equity clubs begun to realize that effective marketing can play a major role in revenue enhancement and bottom line financial success. The major marketing tool in clubs today is the newsletter. We must shift our priorities to a sales mentality and adopt an aggressive program to improve our major marketing vehicle.

The past two decades have brought enhanced competition for our members disposable dollars. Our club members are being inundated by the "information age". We have less time today than ever before. It has been noted that in one year the average American will:

- Read or complete 3000 notices or forms
- Read 100 newspapers and 36 magazines
 - Watch 2463 hours of television
 - Listen to 730 hours of radio
 - Talk on the telephone 61 hours
 - Read at least 3 books

Added to this is the expansion of the Internet that is also vying for our member's time. It becomes continually harder to insure our communications are read and understood by the membership.

Best Practices of the Publishing Industry Can Help Solve the Problem

The publishing industry has been facing the same issues. For years they have used industry standard ' best practices ' to expand readership. Four of these same practices can be applied to the club industry to more effectively deliver our message.

1. Be Visually Impressive

Great magazines and periodicals draw readers to them with impressive photographs, descriptive headlines and issues of general interest to their audience. The cover of the club newsletter is an important element in getting a

member to pick it up and read it. The cover needs to describe club life visually. Extensive written material or lists on the cover are not effective. Full bleed photographs look professional and enhance the general image of the newsletter.

This same professionalism needs to be carried into the body of publication. Timely art, quality photographs and the latest graphics generate interest in the message. The reader will absorb content and be more informed.

2. Have Effective Content

People do not buy newspapers and magazines for the advertisements. Although box scores and schedules of upcoming events are important, readers spend a majority of their time on the articles of interest. The club newsletter is an ideal time to get important information to the membership in the form of articles and essays. It is a missed opportunity when the general manager uses his monthly column to make small talk instead of providing insight regarding club operating concerns for today and in the future.

This same philosophy applies to the other department heads as well. Share your goals. Discuss how and why things are operated as they are. Introduce the membership to new technologies and ideas for improving club life. Don't shy away from the difficult problems. Confront them in an honest and straightforward manner to head off small concerns before they become big ones. Always be upbeat and positive, as this is an opportunity to build club moral.

3. Use Good Journalism

Written communications skills are a must if you are going to expand to better articles and more essays. Not everyone in your organization will be blessed with the ability to deliver an effective article for the newsletter. However, help is available for a variety of sources. Word processing technology can certainly help with grammar and sentence structure. Proofreading by several individuals is also a way of critiquing content to insure written material is interesting and stays on message.

Most good publications are a team effort. The club manager must assemble the right team to consult on journalistic issues. These people may be anywhere in your organization from the new waitress, to the nighttime receptionist, to the assistant tennis professional. Search out employees with the skills you need on the team. Nothing can impact the quality of your newsletter or do more damage to your professional image than poorly written articles and grammatical errors.

4. Be on Time and on Target

ON TIME - Clubs that spend a sizable amount of money developing a newsletter to market it's programs and services needs to get the maximum effect from the

investment. Any marketing vehicle or communicative piece needs to be in the hands of the target audience in a time frame that will facilitate the customer's ability to take advantage of the opportunities presented. If your newsletter arrives at the home of the member later than the beginning of the timeframe covered in the newsletter then the club has not maximized the effectiveness of its investment.

This appears to be a pretty basic concept. Unfortunately it does not appear to be happening on a regular basis. Clubs need to set deadlines that will insure the mail gets to the membership within a certain timeframe. Strictly enforce time lines and hold subcontractors, if any, accountable for their performance.

ON TARGET - This means on point and on message. We must make sure that all necessary information is included and that it hits the target audience. Advertising for upcoming events needs to be clear as to the details. It needs to be presented in such a way as to be noticeable to that group of members that is being targeted. It is always appropriate to group information by subject matter. Make sure the reader can readily move through the information in an orderly manner. Readers need to find what they are looking for while being exposed to that which you want to target.

The purpose of the newsletter is to market your programs and services. Do not miss the boat by missing the point. Include all necessary current information. Then give them a preview of coming attractions so that they can plan their calendars accordingly.

How You Can Get Results

It is mandatory that a priority be placed on internal marketing. Use the newsletter as the primary marketing vehicle. By making the marketing effort an integral part of club operations it will be a natural evolution towards developing the right team, integrating the technological tools available and enhancing the results through training. Combining these techniques with 'best practices' and the club should see solid results long term.

Technological Tools

The advent of in-house desktop publishing capabilities has given clubs new options. Unfortunately not all clubs have seen improvements to their newsletter as they have adopted this new technology. The reason for the lack of progress could be:

1. The club has not made the investment in the necessary technology (either hardware or software) needed to deliver an improved product. The most popular software being used by clubs today is Adobe PageMaker. Proper Scanners, printers and digital cameras are also necessary. It is important to have a PC with

the needed speed memory and Zip drive capabilities because of the large amount of space photos and graphics require. You must invest for success.

2. Necessary training has not taken place so that staff is proficient using the latest technology. These are complicated programs with many bells and whistles. The club should make advanced software training available on a regular and reoccurring basis.

3. There is a lack of creativity within the staff. This is a difficult issue. However, training can overcome some of this problem. Exposure to effective publications will allow even the least creative to become more enlightened.

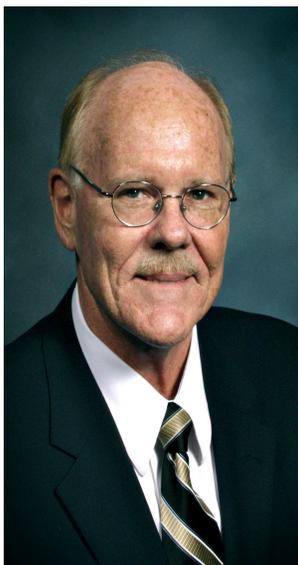
4. There has been a lack of commitment by the management team. Football coach Lou Holtz pointed out the difference between being merely involved and truly committed to a cause with the analogy that a kamikaze pilot that was able to fly several missions was involved - but not truly committed. Managers must have a mindset that technology is the answer to accomplishing better results.

5. The worst problem of all is the club that has used technology to only save money. The advances in technology are opportunities to improve the product, say what you want to better, with more impact and in a more timely fashion. Those clubs that have used it strictly to save money have done a disservice to the marketing effort. The savings from the use of new technology should be reinvested in the product to make it a more powerful and professional publication.

Take Action Now

Only through the leadership of the general manager will progress be made in the marketing effort. The newsletter is the most logical place to begin. It will require commitment. Congratulations to the individual who said, "the reason some people don't recognize opportunity is that it often comes disguised as hard work. Good managers realize that effort is required if one is to make real progress. Don't procrastinate on this most important area of club management. It is not an area that you can totally delegate.

Your involvement is required. Take action now.



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