



Marketing wisely on a shoe-string budget

This is the first in a series of articles I plan to publish this year in Westunes that are specifically talking to the marketing guys in our chapters. I do not profess to be marketing professional by any means, but my intention is to share with you the things I have learned after doing this for many years, and hopefully some of you will benefit from it.

Many chapters are struggling to get the word out about their shows, simply because the more traditional approaches to marketing keep increasing in cost, and their annual budget for marketing keeps decreasing. Trust me, I share your pain.

In this issue, let's take a closer look at some of these strategies, and then let's start to think outside the box to see if we can find some ways to get more bang for the buck.

Many chapters are still using printed flyers, neatly folded, stickered, labeled and mailed to reach their patrons. While I do not dismiss this practice entirely, I will suggest that it's an expensive and labor-intensive undertaking that may do well for your active followers, but is not very effective to attract new business. For example, I have my recycle bin strategically placed between my mailbox and my house, which is where 90% of those expensive flyers wind up when they are sent to people who are unfamiliar with your group. Additionally, unless you regularly pay a hefty sum for "address correction requested", your mailing list becomes increasingly out of date, progressively decreasing your return on investment.

If you are hanging flyers around town, put some thought into where they should be displayed so they are not wasted. For example, ask yourself how many times have you stopped to read the handbills that are plastered on the bul-

letin board at the supermarket, and if your answer is "never", that is probably not a strategic place.

Newspaper ads will reach a much larger market for less expense than mailing flyers, and are most likely a better approach to attracting new patrons, while reaching many of your die-hard fans at the same time. But keep in mind that readership of the printed media is declining everywhere as more and more people are turning to the Internet to get their news. Look for publications that offer advertising in both printed and on-line format, and consider an ad placement in each. If you happen to live in a larger metropolitan area, you will find that the smaller "neighborhood" papers offer much more reasonable rates than the larger papers, and they also tend to get read more since they carry news and features that are close to home. Whatever you do, BE SURE to ask for their non-profit rates!

There are also some "Life after 50" publications that can be considered, and their non-profit rates are usually quite affordable, but keep in mind that they are usually published monthly or quarterly, so in addition to getting your ad placed well in advance, be sure that the timing of their distribution is within a week or two of your show.

Do you have a local PBS station? Consider running an ad in their monthly program guide. That is one publication that DOES get read!

Some churches may be willing to put a short paragraph in their bulletin for free, but also consider offering to provide them with an insert instead. Typically they are 5.5" x 8.5", but be sure to ask them for their page dimensions, and how many copies they will need. The same goes for Elks, Moose, Caribou, Antelope, ... you get the idea.

Run an ad in the show program for a nearby BHS/SAI chapter whose show precedes yours. Their audience already enjoys barbershop, so that's really a no-brainer. And maybe next year they'll return the favor if your show comes before theirs!

Everything we've looked at so far costs money, some much more than others. If what you are spending seems to be paying off, then by all means keep doing it. But always take a close look at some of these other options, because you may find ways to get an even greater return while spending less.

Oh, and speaking of spending less (shameful, gratuitous plug): did you know that you could run a full-page spread in Westunes for only \$50? And quartets can run their business card for just \$12 a year? You'll find our complete list of ad rates and specifications on the FWD website.

Next time, let's take a look at my favorite subject: THE FREE STUFF.

To be continued ...