



Editor's Corner:

Who Should "Sell" Your Chamber?

Last newsletter the editor's corner was dedicated to "Why Do Businesses Join Your Chamber" so now it's time for the CDS philosophy on who should "sell" it.

The simplistic answer is: everyone. Every staff member, every board member, every member! Wouldn't it be a dream come true if every current member just "sold" one member...instant doubling of the membership numbers and dollars! Then staff could be dedicated to working on projects and delivering the Chamber product, rather than on recruiting new members.

But let's get realistic.....it does not happen! I see every week standing before boards of directors who ask me to be there to discuss means to grow their organization, a burning desire on their part for the lifeblood (membership) to increase by more effective recruitment and retention, but a bonfire of desire that it "just happen (what ME??? sell a membership...uh oh)".

So how do the strongest Chambers nationwide sell themselves? They do so with an organized plan that involves multi-facets of advertising and marketing of the Chamber message/product: they identify their market, assess the needs of their market, fine tune their product to meet the needs and then they bring that message to the prospective members. The "they" includes a combination of messengers: everyone on staff from the receptionist to the staff president (not just the staff membership sales department) and volunteers, yes, including the board members.

The methods for volunteers to get involved and participate vary, but there is not enough space here to go into much detail. Suffice to say, your Chamber's philosophy as to how and why they should join, will have a great affect on who should be doing the recruiting and how effective they will be. A good message, brought to the marketplace by someone **well trained** and motivated....a believer....is the best salesperson! Let's hope many of you will continue to turn to

me and CDS to help identify your Chamber message. Together we could then train and motivate your volunteers to spread that message to all in a "Community Awareness Membership Recruitment and Retention Program". Not any one program is ideal for everyone (even mine) but it sure warrants investigating as a possible option for growth!



The following was clipped from a newspaper grocery ad and sent to me: was it a hint that I could (or should?) diversify?



Don't Reinvent the Wheel

One of the greatest attributes of a great Chamber leader is their ability to not reinvent the wheel...ok, the truth is we are an industry of copy cats! So what, if someone else is doing something great and they've worked out all the kinks, why not copy? Isn't there even an old saying about imitation being the highest form of flattery?

So here are my "flatteries" for this month:

Jackson County, Pascagoula, MS, population 120,000, with 1000 members and 6 staff, 228-762-3391, terryc@jcchamber.com) **Terry Carter** faced a very challenging economic downturn with a 2001-2002 **annual report and program of work** that really said it all. The cover/title: "You're Minutes Away from the Real Bare Bones Story of Twelve Months in the Life of a Chamber of Commerce. It's the Story of Big Challenges, Stunning Defeats & Tough Comebacks, Regional Alliances, Daring Moves & Game Altering Initiatives. In many ways, it's a story about our future and the recent past, and about business in Jackson County. That means it's about you, and in particular the Jackson County Chamber of Commerce."

Tompkins County, Ithaca, NY, area population 100,00 with 700 members and 4 staff plus c.v.b. staff, **Jean McPheeters**, jean@tcco.org 607-273-7080) is conducting a comprehensive **strategic planning project** for the Chamber: "Putting Your Ideas into Action". This Chamber always does a first rate job on their projects - their web site and its development is featured later in this newsletter.

Wonderful Websites

One of the greatest tools a Chamber can provide to the community is a well designed, easy to use and comprehensive website that generates lots of activity and shares tons of information. From an organizational growth standpoint, an effective website can be the best tool a Chamber has to spread its message - a premier benefit! I literally review hundreds of Chamber sites annually and want to point out a few that really strike me as exceptional:

Syracuse, New York (population of almost half a million, with 2200 or so members, and staff of 40), www.syracusechamber.com) was mentioned in a previous newsletter for its outstanding site powered by IRM, the membership database software/web developer. Extensive member information is shared on the site for free and there are multiple advertising packages available, affording members broad based inexpensive exposure (and the Chamber reaps much revenue!).

Pocatello, Idaho (population of 60,000 with 750 members and a staff of 6) locally developed their site and maintains one of the most information packed smaller Chamber web presences going! It not only details all the programs and services the Chamber offers, but is a true area digest and complete guide for citizens, visitors and the business community. Check it out at www.pocatelloidaho.com. Talk about a resource!

Tompkins County, New York, as previously mentioned in this newsletter, does just about everything right (and smart too...must be the influence of Cornell University being in residence here!). The headline of one of their newsletters tells the story: "Tompkins County Chamber of Commerce Website Barn Building Initiative or How the Site was Designed, Developed and Launched in Only Weeks, and We're Still Talking to Each Other!" It was an innovative approach with many in the community working collaboratively on the project - but read more about it yourself: www.tompkinschamber.org/barnbuild.htm. Did it turn out well? You bet: it won the Gold Circle national award. Thinking outside of the box and pooling talents is a sure win-win!

Quotes for the Month

"You have to change to grow and grow to live."

"The only person who really wants change is a baby in a wet diaper."

Chamber 101

There is an exciting site for Chambers of Commerce on the internet called Chamber101.com. This site is a great resource for anything about Chambers of Commerce. It is worth your while to take a look at this site.

N.A.M.D. Conference Generates Lots of Ideas

If you've never attended a National Association for Membership Development annual conference, you have really missed something rewarding. Every year CDS attends this conference (which will be even bigger and better next year since it will be a joint N.A.M.D. and A.C.C.E. conference) to reacquaint ourselves with hundreds of Chamber professionals from across the country. The networking is fantastic, with expertise exchanges and problem solving rampant! I happen to think that many who attend are only able to absorb a small fraction of the tremendous numbers of ideas that are shared in the breakout sessions and by the speakers - and of course, by the vendors in the trade show! Some of the ideas shared at the conference were:

"Members love the weekly update "QUICKLY" either faxed or e-mailed on chamber activities as well as "CLOSER LOOK" - updates in brief on school, city and county issues. From Betty Ordal, Sioux Falls, SD

"New this January: When members join they have access to \$15,000 worth of free advertising with fabulous discounts: Billboards and TV (buy one get one free) Radio (15 free 50 second ads) Regional Business Magazine (one free ad) Newspaper (Free ads: buy six get 12) When they renew, they get at \$10,000 package." From Jan Strasfeld, Youngstown, OH

more ideas will be shared in future issues.....