

Membership Marketing

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“We need to fill these Saturdays with business. I never see anything about what’s going on at the Club on Saturdays. Chris, we need to do more marketing!”

Revenue numbers were strong, but the Finance Committee wanted to make better use of the Saturdays. As responsible financial agents of the Club, the committee saw this as an opportunity for GM Chris to get more business, a very reasonable and sound suggestion. Though Chris believed that the logic behind the suggestion was basically sound, Chris felt that the proposed course of action was ultimately rather short-sighted. The Finance Committee had observed that there was little or no marketing for Club events or outside activity. However, Chris knew that exclusivity is a very important part of Membership in a private Club, and that advertising is often detrimental to the long-term success of the business for a variety of reasons, which would be challenging to explain to the Finance Committee. Chris would need to engage with the committee to review what sorts of marketing activities were most beneficial for this private Club.

With a month’s lead time, Chris worked with Beth, the Banquet Coordinator, and Sally, the person in charge of club communications. In addition to communications, Sally was responsible for multiple other duties because it was very hard to convince the Finance Committee to earmark significant budget to a position such as communications. Such a suggestion would never pass muster at the Finance committee!

The team worked on a PowerPoint presentation that outlined the specific activities that were being undertaken to both inform the Membership and create interest in utilizing the Club for private events. The first issue was that of available Saturdays. The team put together a chart that showed the “unused” Saturdays over the past five years and the banquet revenues for each of those years. The chart showed a very nice progression of consistent year-over-year revenue increases. The team agreed that keeping Saturdays open allowed for special revenue opportunities—the revenues could certainly be improved, but the chart clearly illustrated the general principle, and showing the Finance Committee examples of revenue growth helped alter the perception that the Saturdays were not being utilized.

However, there was still no question that designing a marketing campaign to encourage Saturday events was a challenge for a private club. The team decided to address this issue early in its presentation, because they knew that the marketing they did for the Membership was very strong. First, the team discussed the value of normal advertising, along with the issues that it caused for a private not-for-profit club. The team then presented each committee member with a

personalized letter explaining what amenities the Club could offer them, and inviting them to consider using the club for business retreats, golf outings, dinners, and other possible events. These letters were examples of the kinds of letters Sally sent out every week to encourage Members to hold Saturday events at the Club. Sally had mined the computer for information on which Members were affiliated with which businesses, and would individually contact ten different members from her list each week to encourage them to plan events at the Club. Sally would also share this information with senior service staff, who would follow up in person with these Members to further emphasize the value of club events to themselves and to their businesses.

Fortunately for the team, they could end on a high note by correcting the misperception that staff did not do much in the way of marketing to the Membership. The team presented an overview of its marketing program, which consisted of a detailed plan for informational dissemination. Sally and Beth tag-teamed this discussion. They showed that each member event went through a six-week marketing program that was tracked on an event whiteboard in the office. To begin the process, a flier and “Week-at-a-Glance” (WAAG) email would be posted six weeks out. The WAAG was a message that went out every Wednesday with information about upcoming events, along with pictures, club news, and menus for the week. On the fourth week before the event, information would be placed in the menus and a website flier created. At three weeks, the flier would be reposted in the menus and placed in the check presenters; a link in the WAAG would be posted as well. At two weeks, each of these marketing strategies is reinforced with verbal marketing: staff would casually mention these events to members as they were serving them. For example, the Smith family might sit down at dinner with their three children, and partway through the meal, while refilling waters, the server would ask, “Will you be attending the Family Tiki Party this Friday? It should be a great time for the kids, and there will be delicious Hawaiian barbeque.” Verbal marketing is a very friendly and personable way for staff to remind members of an event and invite them to attend.

In the final week prior to the event, the verbal marketing would continue, along with the WAAG e-mail reminders. Last of all, on the day before an event, a text message reminder would be sent if the event wasn’t already sold out. For example: “6 PM Tiki Party Tomorrow! Please call Beth for Reservations at 408-123-4567.” The text was a nice “last chance” for Members who had postponed their commitment to an event.

After Sally reviewed the internal marketing at the Club, she went over their “post-event” marketing strategy. Sally and Beth described how they post pictures that best capture the member’s experience the day after an event. These photos are posted on the Club webpage, WAAG, Pinterest album, and Facebook page. The photos display the stunning venue and arrangements. They also capture the members having a great time at the occasion. Posting these pictures gives attendees a chance to reflect on their experience at the Club, and may cause Members who didn’t attend the event to consider attending the next one. Sally and Beth made clear that with their solid six-week marketing program, no event slips by.

Bill, the Finance Committee chair, suggested that Facebook was an excellent way to showcase the Club. Both Sally and Beth agreed, and explained that the Club had two FB pages: one for internal Member use, showcasing items such as pictures and stories of Club activities, and a public page with only generic pictures of activities or group photos, where no Members or guests can be recognized.

In the end, the Finance Committee was very pleased with the Club communications and clearly saw that the Saturdays were being well-utilized. All it took was good communication.

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