

With Spring, Thoughts Turn to Membership Drive Program

BY HEIDI VOSS

As we march into spring, the clubs in cold climates are wondering if membership sales will ever pick up, and the clubs in warm climates are preparing to kiss their members goodbye and send them home for the summer.

For the colder climates, it's an ideal time to design a membership referral program for the golf season. Why should we create incentives for our members to refer their friends?

Many of the old, stodgy clubs' leaders might say, "It is a member's duty and obligation to sponsor new members." Well, it may be just that, but it appears that many of the members missed that memo and they just aren't highly motivated to bring in more people who are going to want those precious 8 a.m. tee times that they've monopolized for the past 20 years.

Why are referrals important enough to merit so much of our membership dollars and time? Early in the formation of my membership consulting company I

began to track the conversion of prospects to new members. I was always curious as to where the members were coming from and how quickly they would join a club.



We found that those who call on the phone to inquire about membership have about a 10 percent chance of joining the club. Those

who stumble in the front doors for a tour rose to about 20 percent likelihood, and those who were referred to a club by a member leapt to 50 percent.

Wait, it gets better. If they are referred by a new member who has been in the club less than 30 days, the rate jumps to about 80 percent.

These are spectacular numbers when you consider the return on direct mail, which is about 1 percent to 2 percent response and maybe a 1 in 10 conversion rate.

The first key is to get your members involved in the design of a program. Ask them what would motivate them to bring their friends into the club.

Offer incentives to sponsors, such as club credits, special golf days or trips and merchandise. These are just a few ideas, but all clubs are

different and their members have different hot buttons to push.

I will caution you on one thing that the late founder of ClubCorp instilled in my heart: Don't give away dues. Keep them sacred and show your members how important dues are for the livelihood of the club.

The second key is to set a timeline when the program will expire. If I know it's only going to run for 90 days, I'll get moving.

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Remember to look at your closing rates and how long it takes you to convert someone from a prospect to a member and be sensitive when giving your members deadlines.

The third key is to provide your members with events to introduce their friends to a club. Member mixers on a Thursday evening would be one example. You can also provide complimentary social hours for those who bring a

prospective member from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m.

Don't forget to promote the referral program. Train the staff, get buttons for their uniforms that remind members, use table tents in the grille, send out a reminder postcard campaign, devote the cover of the newsletter to it, and lastly, announce winners each month.

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Remember, to be generous with your incentives. Handing out a divot repair tool for a \$30,000 membership somehow does not prove to be highly motivational. On the other

hand, you don't need to give them a Lexus. Just land somewhere in the middle and be sure to get your members involved in the process.

Heidi Voss is president of Bauer Voss Consulting, a club marketing consulting company. She specializes in new development as well as club conversions from public to private as well as member buyouts. For more information, contact www.bauervossconsulting.com.