

Non-traditional Advertising



In this chapter, we will discuss several non-traditional marketing techniques that may help to boost customer interest in your disability consulting service. The techniques mentioned in this lesson are either free or inexpensive and should be seriously considered by the beginning disability consultant.

Community Access Channel:

A community access channel is a television station that is provided free to a local community by a cable company. These channels are designed to be used free of charge by members of the community. The subjects covered on these channels must have wide community interest and be in good taste. Community channels are watched by a surprisingly large number of people and should be used by all apprentice disability consultants.

It is extremely easy to get access to a community channel. First prepare a presentation in a question and answer format to be used on the show. If the channel already has a regularly scheduled program with established viewers, use that program to reach a larger audience. Dead space or unscheduled airing of your presentation would not work well because no one may be watching.

In order to get yourself scheduled on a community program, call your local cable system and ask for the name of the person to be contacted for community access television. Then contact the appropriate person and set up an interview. Present your service to the cable person responsible for program scheduling and request air time on an existing program if possible. Generally, you will find yourself on cable community access television in less than a month.

If you find that the access channel approach is getting results, try to schedule a series of presentations or request your own show. You can actually promote your own show through normal advertising methods that in turn will increase the number of people watching your program. Hopefully, this approach will make community awareness of your service grow rapidly. Community access

television is free, which makes it an ideal medium for introducing your service to the community.

Chamber of Commerce:

In an earlier chapter of this manual, we spoke of placing business cards and brochure displays in businesses that serve the disabled. An easy way to find out what businesses fit this category is through your local Chamber of Commerce. If asked, a local chamber can refer you to businesses who may be willing to allow you to place a display ad in their facility. It is always easier to approach a vendor who is a member of the same club that you are. Consider joining your local Chamber of Commerce or the Better Business Bureau as another means of networking your service. The BBB can supply much of the same information as the Chamber via its membership roster.

Church Bulletins:

Across every city in America there are numerous religious denominations, each publishing its own church bulletin. You might offer to make a small donation to a church who is willing to run a small ad in their bulletin introducing your service to its members. Stress the fact that disability consulting is a public service business and is only out to help those unfortunate individuals who may need such a service. A church bulletin may have a large circulation and is usually carefully read by members. This approach could be extremely cost effective and an excellent way to increase community awareness of your service.

If you would like to cut across all religious lines in your advertising, see if your community offers a Shepherds Guide. A Shepherds Guide is a yellow page box for religious organizations. It contains yellow page ads on every church or denomination in a specific area. Consider placing your ad in one of these guides as a means of reaching a large religious population.

Sponsor Community Events:

Like public access T.V., sponsoring community events is a good source of public relations. You can cheaply sponsor a community event as a means of getting your company name into the public eye. Events like Special Olympics or Run-a-Thons usually have a number of large sponsors that effectively lower the cost of participation. Look around for events in your community, especially in

the summer months. I'm sure you will find a number of worthwhile events that can bring public notoriety to your company.

Electronic Mail Box:

An electronic mail box (voice mail) is a system that allows you to program a number of specific messages directed at customers who have called your company. If, for example, an individual calls your company when you are not available, he will hear a specially developed recorded message giving him specific information about your service.

We use this approach ourselves on our national service line! The recording will instruct the caller to push a number for a particular message. An electronic mail box system will allow you to give complete presentations about your service to customers over the phone without the need to add additional staff just to answer the phone. This system can be very cost effective in that it allows you to explain your service without actually having to dedicate valuable staff time to doing so.

Electronic mail box systems can be expensive, but there is a way to enjoy them without actually purchasing the systems. Many of the large secretarial and answering services offer electronic mail boxes for rent on a monthly basis. This type of service can be had for as little as fifty dollars a month depending upon the complexity of your message. We strongly recommend that you try the electronic mail box approach as a means of giving inexpensive presentations about your service to potential customers each time they call.

Promotional Sundries:

Promotional sundries are any inexpensive article that has your company name, address, logo and phone number on it. Objects like pens, key rings, magnets and toys are all examples of promotional sundries. You can have these sundries produced easily and hand them out to the public every chance you get.

At any public event, interview or presentation, be sure to hand out your business card and sundries. The promotional sundries that are most effective are those that are useful to the potential customer. Usefulness is why pens and key rings are the most popular form of promotional sundries. These sundries can be produced very cheaply if done in mass, and are well worth the expense.

Contact any printing shop or sundry dealer in your local area for additional information.

Computer marketing:

Disability consulting, like so many other industries today, is quickly entering into the age of computers. Not only can a computer be used to produce and organize large volumes of written materials for your company, it can also be used as a state of the art marketing tool.

Any software program that can either call or answer callers who contact your company is useful. These programs can take or deliver messages twenty four hours per day.

Imagine having a computer working long hours without pay or complaint, calling customers with any message you wish to convey twenty four hours per day. These programs allow you to program in a message and a group of phone numbers from any source. The program will then begin to call these numbers and deliver your advertising message until all numbers are called or until you shut it off. If someone answers, the program will deliver your introductory business message to the customer. If an answering machine is reached, most will leave your ad message on the customer's recorder. If there is no answer, the program will automatically move on to the next caller.

If you decide to try the computer message approach to marketing your service, we have a few suggestions:

1._ Start by using local phone numbers. Not only will this save you money by not making long distance calls, it will also allow you to cheaply test the effectiveness of your advertising message. It is always wise to first build your service locally. These call programs are ideal for quickly getting the word out that your unique service is now available.

2._ The message itself must be short and concise. Do not waste the customer's time with unnecessary nonsense in your message. Clearly explain in as few words as possible what your service is and the benefits it can offer the customer. The more customer benefits stated in your ad, the more likely the customer is to use your service. If you have any educational or vocational credentials that may enhance the credibility of your service, use it in your ad presentation.

3._ State the name and phone number of your company at least twice in your ad. If you are in the yellow pages locally, tell your customers that they can find you there.

4._ Do not call anyone at home during the dinner hour or after nine p.m. We suggest you start your calls at 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and resume again from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. locally. Calling with the above time schedule in mind will reduce customer aggravation. However, customer aggravation to some degree will always occur and this can also be used to your advantage. Let's face it, people who hear your message once will say, "that's an interesting service". People who hear your message twice will say, "OK, I got the message". People who hear the ad a third time will just hang up, but believe me, they will remember that your service exists.

5._ Space calls to the same customers at least one or two weeks apart. What is really nice about these types of computer call programs is that you need not be there while they work. The computer will make the calls without any further input from you, allowing you to do other things while introducing your service all across your community.

There are several customer contact software programs available. We suggest calling any software company or viewing PC magazines for brands. These programs come in a variety of names and capabilities. Be sure to ask about computer types and specifications required to operate a given program. Requesting the software company's catalog before purchasing is always a good idea!

Hospital Publications:

Many hospitals throughout the country publish their own hospital bulletins, news letters, flyers or magazines. These publications maybe an ideal source of referrals if they accept outside advertising. Usually, these publications will accept ads if the product or service being offered has some value to the inpatient population.

We suggest that you approach several of your local hospital or medical centers including VA hospitals and determine if such an opportunity is available. This approach can result in a valuable and consistent source of referrals.

Cable T.V. Scheduling Ad:

This is a unique approach brought to our attention by a few of our most successful students. On many cable systems around the country, there exists a scheduling channel or magazine that lists or plays nothing but the cable schedule for a particular day. These schedules are usually presented on half screen with the other half of the screen used to air local and national ads. Several of our students have informed us that this approach works extremely well and use it as their only advertising source.

These ads can be run at reasonable prices and you have a little more control of the actual air times. One student in California ran a thirty second spot for just a few hundred dollars and found himself swamped with new clients. Placing an ad in a cable scheduling magazine can have the same positive effect. A cheap way of determining if this will work may be as easy as determining if anyone else is doing it. If attorneys are using this approach, for example, so should you!

We suggest that you call your local cable channel advertising department and ask about this schedule approach. This may turn out to be a very cost effective way of enjoying T.V. advertising without the usual outrageous cost. Remember, you may still have to incur the expense of producing the ad rather it be broadcast or print.

Calendars:

Producing your own calendar on computer is both inexpensive and a highly effective advertising approach. There are a number of calendar programs available that can be used to generate the prototype copy. If this approach is used, you can place a significant amount of information on the calendar about your company, it's services and about the SSA disability process in general. This information if properly structured will act to inform a potential customer so that over time, he will utilize your services either for himself or a family member.

The Direct Payment Approach:

The direct fee approach is both a marketing technique and a means by which a disability consultant can eliminate the need to bill the client directly. Let's address the marketing aspect of this approach first. In order for a non-attorney to be paid directly from SSA, he must have a contractual relationship with an

attorney. That is, you must create a partnership of sorts that allows both you and the attorney to be paid for your combined involvement in a disability claim.

Upon creating such a relationship, it would be wise from a marketing standpoint, to make your customers aware of this relationship. This can be done by simply mentioning your ongoing relationship in such a manner that it appears that the claimant is getting twice the representational support from a single contract. Most disability applicants find it desirable to have both an attorney and a specialist both focusing on their case.

Creating a direct pay relationship:

Creating a direct pay relationship with an attorney is not difficult. Here is what we suggest. You must utilize the services of two attorneys to create this relationship. One attorney is used to create a contract to be used by you and the other attorney in creating your relationship. Do not allow the same attorney to both draw up the contract and participate in the contractual agreement. This is simply not prudent!

Once you have a contract that spells out the relationship between yourself and the attorney as described below, you are ready to approach a second attorney with the following offer:

1) The disability consultant and the attorney are entering into a time sensitive contract. Usually one year. This contract allows the consultant and the attorney to both solicit disability clients independent of one another.

The attorney and the consultant are working in tangent to provide effective disability services to the public. However, the attorney's responsibilities are different from that of the consultant. The attorney is used primarily as the authority in the case and the consultant is used for his specific expertise in the evaluation of a disability claim.

2) If the client is acquired via the efforts of the attorney, the consultant will provide all required representational services for completion of the case. However, the case will be registered in the name of the attorney as the client's authorized representative.

The attorney's name will appear first on all 1696 forms under this relationship. It is wise to name the consultant as the assistant advocate on the 1696 so that he might acquire documentation under the attorney's authority. This should be

done regardless of who actually acquired the client.

Upon the successful completion of the case, the attorney will present SSA with the appropriate fee petition or agreement, and the fee will be paid directly to the attorney. The attorney will then immediately pay the consultant a percentage of the fee for services rendered under the terms of the contract. If the attorney acquired the client, his portion of the fee should not exceed sixty percent because the work was actually performed by the consultant.

3) If the client is acquired as a result of the consultant's efforts, the attorney's name will still appear on the 1696 as the authorized representative. The consultant will still provide all required representational services for completion of the case.

Upon the successful completion of the case, the attorney will present SSA with the appropriate fee petition or agreement, and the fee will be paid directly to the attorney. The attorney will then immediately pay the consultant a percentage of the fee for services rendered under the terms of the contract.

If the consultant acquired the client, his portion of the fee should not exceed seventy percent of the total fee paid to the attorney, despite the fact that the consultant performed the work.

This relationship allows both the attorney and the consultant to utilize their specific strengths and legal authority under SSA regulations. It also allows both parties to enjoy a significant portion of all cases acquired for the purpose of representation.

This approach to representation will completely eliminate the need for a consultant to bill the client, because payment will come directly to the attorney from SSA. The attorney is responsible for providing authority and submission of fee request to SSA. The consultant is responsible for those functions associated with the development and presentation of the case. If the contract is properly constructed, both parties are protected in respect to responsibilities and payment percentages.