

THOUGHTS ABOUT SEMINAR PROMOTION

by Gordon Burgett

To promote your seminar, other people must know about it. Making them aware of its existence can cost more than all of your other costs combined. So success with self-promoted seminars is directly related to how you inform potential participants, its cost, and the sign-ups resulting from that information.

Some things help before you blow the first bugle.

If you are well known, participants may come simply to see and hear you. So one tool is to make yourself better known—and worth hearing.

If the title of your seminar sparks instant interest, you might be able to thrive with a minimum of planned publicity, counting on word-of-mouth (and usually greed) to draw an audience. If you plan to show how to turn kitchen spoons into gold, for example, you could probably speak at the dump at 2 a.m. and charge \$200 a head and make more money than you could count. Show a few opportunists a "before" spoon and an "after" gilded creation, tell each to bring a friend who can bring a friend, and so on ... a pyramiding example, but it makes the point. Two things are at play here: the title (or topic) and your credibility.

A third element is crucial: audience identity. You must know to a type and age the kind of people who will benefit most from hearing you speak—who needs to know what you will say, why, and what benefits they can expect from it. You must also have a feeling for how badly they need your message, or think they need it. And you must sense how much they will pay to attend the seminar.

Assuming that you have worked and worked at developing a clear, enticing title followed by an exciting, honest, reward-promising description—and that you have identified who will attend and why,—then what remains is simple: getting as many through the door for as little expense as possible.

So first you should concentrate on the freebies, which may be the most important anyway.

Start with a news release sent to every possible outlet: newspapers (dailies, weeklies, free handouts), newsletters, company organs, any vehicle read by folks who might attend your gathering. Also send a b/w photo to those with the greatest impact on potential participants. (Make sure that your appearance is in keeping with your purpose: tie and coat if you want businessmen at your meeting, etc.)

Then condense your material into radio-TV release segments: 3-4 lines for a 5-second spot; double that for 10 seconds. Write "COMMUNITY ACTIVITY" on top, followed by the copy and your name, address, and phone. No photo here, of course.

What are the chances that this material will be used? Good for newspapers if it sounds newsworthy, poor for radio, worse for TV, but it's free and if it is used you are that much ahead. Any exposure makes others aware, increases your visibility, and helps.

To increase your exposure even more, contact the area talk show program directors to see if you could appear on a show some days before your seminar to discuss your topic. Tell him/her why the subject would interest the listeners. (Don't dwell on the seminar if you do appear; mention it once and refer to it, if appropriate, again before the show closes: that's enough)

Your best selling tool is you, so visit every group, organization, gathering, or outlet you can to tell others about your offering. Contact the meeting director and ask for two minutes early in the session. Introduce yourself, your topic, why they would benefit from attending, and how to sign up. Leave enough flyers for all in attendance. Ask others interested in your program to tell friends. Put flyers on bulletin boards, in places where participants might gather, or at any logical spot where they might attract sign-ups. At \$30 per participant, one extra person equals at least 600 flyers!

Flyers: I can't tell you how to make them here. Most of it is common sense. Two places can help you with basic how-to information: art supply stores (sometimes office supply too), that sell the tools, and printers, who put the flyer on paper. Tell either what you have in mind, find an example similar to what you want to create among the millions of flyers in the mail and on boards, and let them tell you how to make one like it. A seminar or even a class about basic graphics and flyermaking should be seriously considered if you will be your own provider.

Keep in mind: a flyer is a selling tool. It needn't be done in three colors on glossy paper to impress, but it must be clear, neat, errorless, and inviting. Too much copy is worse than too little: white or blank space means class. Stick to simple type, straightforward messages, don't be too funny, get the "5 Ws and H" down—who, what, why, where, when, and how—and be sure that the title is what everyone sees first. The viewer will assume that the seminar is like the flyer. Too shoddy and they'll stay away.

If you want to send your flyer to many people, read the pages in Burgett's seminar workbook about mailing lists.

Newspaper advertising? Probably a waste of your limited funds, unless just about everybody would want to attend, you have money to buy a big splash (1/3 of a page or more) to run about three times, or you can place a key ad in a specific section read only by your people. The major exception is for a specialty newspaper, like one sent to nurses only when your seminar offers BRN credit to nurses.

Likewise, radio and TV are not good vehicles for paid seminar advertising unless the appeal is extremely broad or you can somehow focus your topic and the programming of the station on a specific audience: a seminar on how to become a professional umpire needs a spot, if any at all, in the middle of the sports results.

How to get started with newspaper, radio, or TV ad if you think they are for you? Go to the person who sells the ad space, leave your wallet at home (I'm not kidding), and say, "I think that your

(____) would be a good vehicle to advertise my seminar about _____. Do you? (Of course.) Then how would I go about setting up the best ad possible to draw the most participants?" Let the person explain, write it down, take the handouts, and go home and think. Don't buy the whole package: try one ad and test. Rewrite it if it doesn't draw well, and test again.... Compare costs and evaluate possible results. If you decide to go ahead, do everything you can yourself, hiring others to do the rest on a freelance basis and under the condition that they will explain how they did what they did. Soon enough you'll be able to do it all. About 90% of promotion is common sense and a hard financial eye, plus some creativity. The rest needs tools.

You are the best advertising possible. Your enthusiasm, your drive, your planning and your clear prose. Put that in action, on paper, and in motion through friends. Let everybody know, keep a hard eye on expenses, and study everything you see in print or the media to see how others are doing it. By your third seminar you will have it down cold—if you hustle, plan, and economize enough in the beginning to last three!

If you're offering seminars, you should be considering niche books, audio cassettes, articles and the other information dissemination means that Gordon Burgett discusses in ***Publishing to Niche Markets, Empire-Building by Writing and Speaking***, and ***Niche Marketing***. For more details, see <http://www.sops.com>—see Writing or Products. (And if you're getting older, you might sneak a peek at his new ***How to Create Your Own Super Second Life: What Are You Going to Do With Your Extra 30 Years?***)