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Million Dollar Marketing eReport

Exploding your Profits with Seminars and Workshops

Special Report from Jim McCraigh

Over the last 16 years, I have used speaking as the primary method of profitably promoting my business. I've learned that seminars and workshops have incredible power to open doors in business. During those times, I have been able to pick up the phone and get through to anyone who has recently attended one of my presentations... and always received a warm welcome as if I was a friend!

Customers like to do business with people they perceive as experts. How can you position yourself as an expert? By presenting short talks, workshops, and seminars to audiences made up of individuals in your target market.

Here's How You Can Get Started

A quick way to get in front of an audience is to offer free presentations to local groups. There are thousands of meetings everyday in the U.S. Most of them have a speaker of one sort or another.

Consider local chambers of commerce, special interest clubs, service groups and business associations to get started. Most of these groups have no budget to pay presenters, but getting paid is not your objective. You are looking for an opportunity to attract new customers who will produce far more in revenue than a small speaker's fee! If you are new to speaking, groups such as Rotary and Lions Clubs represent a great place to begin. Seek them out, give a great presentation and you will be handsomely rewarded with new business and referrals to speak elsewhere.

Before Your First Presentation

If the key to a good presentation is preparation, the key to a great one is rehearsal! It will take you about 4 hours of preparation for a one hour talk. Most speeches that seem hopelessly boring are usually just short on interesting subject material. Be sure to have more than enough substance to fill the time allotted. If you can't get it all in, that's fine, they did not know what you planned to say anyway! Leaving the audience wanting more is almost always a good strategy. Leaving without saying much is deadly.

Once you have your raw material ready, organize your talk. Here is a proven outline you can follow:

OPENING: Begin with a story that makes a point of why they should listen to your talk. Forget opening with a joke unless you are a comedian. People love stories. Use one from your own business or personal experience. NEVER use a story you heard from another speaker. Speakers get around. If your audience has heard it before you'll look very foolish... Or even worse! The first two minutes of your opening is one part of your talk you should commit to memory. Since it will be your own story that should be easy!

CONTENT: Make three points about your topic that are extremely helpful to your audience. Today listeners want solid, how to information, not theory. Concentrate on things that will them save time and money or have a WOW! Factor. Don't hold back. Answer every question fully, without hesitation. Some speakers fear that they will give away so much information that the members of the audience will no longer need their services. Actually, the opposite is true. **The paradox here is that the more you tell them, the more they will trust you and want to do business with you.** Many prospects don't have the ability to judge your competence by simply asking questions. But they will automatically view you as an expert if you are able to present a credible and informative seminar.

QUESTION AND ANSWER PERIOD: Most audiences will want the opportunity to ask questions before you conclude. However, there is no more uninspiring way to end your talk than asking if there are any questions and no one raises their hand. If there are really no questions, have one of your own prepared for this situation. An example might be, "One question that people usually ask is why computers blah, blah, blah... I typically answer that blah, blah, blah..." This way you will end on a high note and not dead silence.

CLOSE: Leave them with one final thought. An example from the One Page Business Plan® Workshop is, "Plan Your Work, Work Your Plan, and celebrate Your Success!" It is memorable and makes a point.

Rehearse your talk at least 4 or 5 times before you present it for the first time. Time yourself to see how long it takes to cover your prepared material. Tape yourself and play it back. Hand the tape to a business associate that can provide critical feedback. (Family, friends, and employees are often much too kind!) Rehearse your talk again just before you give it. After a number of presentations, you will be able to reduce this to just one rehearsal. Even as a professional speaker, I will always rehearse material I have not presented for a month or two.

Are notes OK when you give your talk?

You should rehearse enough to reduce your dependence on notes to an occasional quick glance. Use no more than 1 or 2 pages of notes. (One piece of paper, two sides). If you can't do this, you are not ready to present.

OK. If you really feel you need notes... Here's a slick trick you can use to get around that. Prepare a fill-in -the-blanks handout sheet that you can follow along as you present. Mark your copy with the "answers" and no one will ever know!

By the way, be sure any handouts you use have your name, phone, and URL on each page. They will need a way to contact you when the need arises!

Just Before Your Presentation

It is extremely important to have a typed (double-spaced, 18-point type) introduction ready to hand to the person that introduces you just before you begin speaking. There are a number of reasons for this:

1. It will help insure that they introduce you, your business, and your credentials properly.
2. It will give you the opportunity to plug yourself a bit without you having to say it yourself. It is always more believable for someone else to say it.
3. It allows you to provide a phonetic spelling of your name if it is difficult for most people to pronounce it properly.
4. It makes you look highly professional and well organized.

Give it to your introducer in enough time for them to read it over and ask questions before having to actually introduce you.

During Your Presentation

There are two things you must say while presenting your talk that will help insure that some members of the audience will do business with you at some time in the future. These are:

1. The fact that you are in business and have customers. Tell stories about your business and mention your products and services in passing. For example, if you owned a computer store you might say something like... "A customer came in and was looking at our laptop computers and asked about the difference between the displays". Then go on to talk about different types of displays.
2. Discreetly tell success stories about how you have helped customers and clients over the years. An example for an image consultant might be... "We had just a day's notice before her do-or-die job interview. The question was, How much could we do in 24 hours?" Go on to explain how you got her ready in time and the fact that she got the job! (Do this without ever revealing your client's name-- even if you have written permission. If the audience even suspects that you talk indiscreetly about clients, they will assume you'll talk about them someday)

I've seen speakers do awesome presentations without mentioning these two things and walk away without any business to show for the day.

Just After Your Presentation

Obtain the names and addresses of all attendees. You can do a business card drawing for a small prize or get the list from the group contact after the event. But get the names before you leave the room! Add these people to your mailing list. Since they have heard you speak, they feel they know you and will be much more likely to respond to your calls and offers.

A Selling Secret...

Here's a well kept secret that only the pros know about! Prepare a short evaluation with two questions about the program. These are: A rating of your presentation on a scale of 1-10 and a question about "the most practical, usable thing they learned today." The 1-10 question lets the meeting planner you did a good job. The second questions give you clues for your promotional materials. The rest of the "evaluation" should consist of check-off boxes like "call me about a free assessment of my computer system" or "Call me about a tax question" or what ever is appropriate for you. Have another check box for "contacting you regarding speaking to other groups of which they might also

be a member." Finally, ask for their e-mail address for updates on your subject area. These freely given addresses will be very valuable to you in the future!

Getting Booked

Booking these types of presentations is usually a matter of persistence. Single sided promotional sheets to the speaker coordinator of the group followed with a telephone call usually works best. Have this one-page description of your talk ready to immediately mail or fax to the decision-maker. Be sure have a photo on your one-sheet. Also, be sure you fax it only if the photo transmits well. They want to see you, not a blob of toner!

In my experience, you will generally have better results if you have someone other than yourself make the calls. It's tough to tell them what a great speaker you are, and far more believable if someone else says it!

Select groups that are comprised of people who are members of your target market— small business owners, engaged couples, people with rental property and so on. Lists of trade and civic groups can be found in directories available in most public libraries.

Getting Booked More

Referrals are the second best way to get additional bookings. Always ask the meeting planner for referrals to other groups after your presentation. If you have done a great job, they will always be willing. By the way, the number one way that speaker coordinators select speakers is from a list of those they have heard before... Essentially this means that the more you speak, the more you speak!

A VERY BIG Step ... Public Seminars

The pay for attendance public seminar business is a highly competitive industry. There is a number of high volume, well-entrenched operators presenting seminars that have the advantage of well-developed infrastructures and large economies of scale. There are some promoters who would lead you to believe that you can easily fill a room with attendees. The fact is that an aggressive foray into public seminars by new players will very likely lose money. I advise you against it.

If you are still bent on doing public seminars, keep the seminars small (less than 20 people) and local at first to TEST your idea. This will allow you to keep the breakeven low and the economic risk reasonable. Your objective should be to build your client base, not to make money on the seminar.

The key making public seminars work from an economic standpoint is to keep these presentations limited in scope and to utilize them as a marketing activity designed to generate a source of new clients rather than a profit making business in itself.

It should also be noted that the location of your seminar will have a bearing on how well attended the presentation will be. It will be in your best interest to choose first class facilities in upscale areas. If your office is in such an area and is large enough, then you might consider holding your presentation there. If not, go to a hotel with meeting rooms.

There are three areas will be critical in your success in promoting local seminars:

Mailing Lists

The most important element in the process of marketing a seminar or clinic is to have the right mailing list you select if you choose to promote by direct mail. I would strongly suggest using a list broker who has experience with seminar companies.

Another important reason to use a list broker is that your mailers will need to meet postal regulations. The Post Office is very particular about how mailings are addressed. Use the services of a commercial mail house to provide proper sorting and mailing preparation in order to achieve the best postage rate possible. (It is very difficult for you to do this by yourself.) Mail houses are well worth their fee in terms of the time and hassle they save. Rates for this service range from 3.4 to 6.0 cents per mailer, depending on quantity. Many mail houses will allow you to use their postal indicia if you wish to mail presorted or bulk mail. This can represent a saving over securing your own. Talk to them and the post office before you design your mailer.

With a well constructed mailer, you can expect a capture rate (the percentage of total mailers resulting in a registration) of between .3 and .8 of one percent. This is a razor thin margin and allows little room for error.

The Seminar Mailer

The sale of your seminar takes place in the mind of the prospect at the time they read your mailer. (This is true whether you charge or not. Some people will value their time more than their money.) You can have the best program in the world, but unless you can communicate that to the reader, your programs will be poorly attended.

To produce sufficient results, the seminar mailer itself must be structured in a very specific manner. Besides being attractive from an eye appeal standpoint, each of the following elements must be present or your response will be adversely affected. These are:

What the prospect will learn...

Be clear on what you will cover. Include your seminar agenda in the mailer. This is an important factor in the mind of the reader. They want to be sure that they will learn something new.

Why the prospect should attend...

Good copy must stress the benefits of attending the program. You must answer the question as to why should they take time from their busy schedule. Benefits include saving time or money and reducing their frustration level with the software. Stress the fact that attending your program will teach them what they must know about your subject in the shortest period of time possible.

Testimonials...

Include at least five strong, positive statements from satisfied attendees of past programs. Have on file copies of their written permission to quote them. If you don't have any, look at the section below on "private" presentations. Postal regulations require this! We provide a space for that on class evaluation forms that makes it easy for them to allow us to quote them.

The presenters qualifications...

Potential attendees will want to know why they should listen to you. Include a summary of your qualifications and a great photograph of yourself. A professionally taken photo will let them feel as if they know you and be more responsive to your message.

Seminar materials...

The market dictates that you have exceptional handout materials for your presentation. Don't skip here. Avoid photocopies if you are going to include screen shots in your materials. Use a Docutech or other high quality, direct from disk duplication system to manufacture your materials. As I mentioned before, be sure to put your name and contact information on every page of every handout that you distribute. You want people to remember how to contact you long after the program.

Other elements that must be included are date, time and place of the presentation, a cancellation policy, a registration form, a contact number for questions about the seminar, an agenda for the program and payment terms. It will be very much to your advantage to accept credit cards for seminar

registrations, especially if you do more than one or two programs per year. To set this up, check with your banker. Also mention the handout materials you will be offering, as this is an important benefit of attending.

Be aware that seminar mailers must meet specific size, folding, and sealing requirements or be rejected by postal authorities. Before you print any mailer take a full size laser printed copy to your local Postmaster for approval. Your mail house can also help you with this. Use a mailer that is at least two colors on good quality white paper. Some of these things may seem obvious, but I've seen mailers without them!

Timing of the Mailing

Seasonality may also affect the returns that you will get from seminar mailings. Better months generally include January, September, and October, although you will find most months workable as long as you stay away from holidays and tax time. Also try to avoid schools holidays as these can present childcare issues for many potential attendees.

Surveys show your attendance will tend to be best on weekdays, especially Wednesday through Friday. Saturday programs can work, but avoid three-day weekends and the Saturdays proceeding holidays like Christmas, Hanukkah or Easter. These are rules-of-thumb, not hard and fast pronouncements. It will also be in your best interest to keep a watch on competitors that could come into your local market area. A competitive public seminar the same week or month in your market could totally undermine your program.

For best results, mailers need to be in the hands of possible attendees no later than 35 days before the program. If you mail too soon, you run the risk that recipients will put it aside only to forget about the program. If you mail too late, your program will not have sufficient time to build, or prospects will have made other commitments that will limit your attendance.

Mail should be sent presorted first class. Bulk mailers (third class) present a risk for time dated materials. Bulk mail is handled after first class mail by postal facilities. Such a mailing can take up to three weeks to arrive, and the cost savings are simply not worth the risk.

The Best Idea Yet... Worth Far More than the Price of this Report!

Getting booked by organizations and promoting public seminars, while great ways to get in front of an audience, have one thing in common... they can take a while to get up and running. So, if you are a bit impatient like I am, there is a much faster way... setting up your own events.

One of my clients does these and calls them “executive briefings”. You can call them whatever makes sense in your industry. He mails out (or emails) invitations to a 60-90 minute breakfast/networking meeting. He usually holds them on Thursday mornings... Not too early as some prospective attendees need to stop by the office or drop children at school before the event. He asks them to RSVP and almost always follows up with a phone call to personally invite them.

Who does he invite? Past customers, current customers, and prospects, as well as people he would like to do business with. When he makes his pre-program “invite calls”, he asks those who will attend to bring an associate from another company or a friend. He charges \$10 for the breakfast because this seems to work better than doing it for free. He often holds them in bank conference rooms and invites the banker to sit in for free. Sometimes he uses hotel meeting rooms, which can be cost effective if food service is involved.

People get to mingle and eat for the first portion of the meeting, then once everyone has had time to eat, he does a presentation that informs and educates them. He refrains from selling, but offers a free follow up meeting during the week afterwards and gives them a list of his services with contact information on the back of his handout. Invariably, someone will ask him to take a minute to tell them about his business. That’s were he gets to plug himself. If no one does, he’ll ask a buddy in the audience to do so!

In the early 1990s, I did a series of “Consultant’s Connection” monthly meetings over a period of three years. I never outright sold, but gained enough clients from that series to make it very worth my while and make many tens of thousands of dollars in profit from business gained from those meetings. I charged for admission, and broke even on the deal. That’s a whole lot better than paying for advertising!

I would highly recommend that you consider doing your own events. Often, they will lead to bookings in other settings... especially if you later ask people who attend if they belong to groups that bring in outside speakers. And it doesn’t have to be professional services you sell, it can be anything from aluminum to zinc.

Some Final Thoughts...

Well, there you have it, a short course in speaking to promote your business! You will discover, the more you speak in public, the better speaker you will become. The better speaker you are, the more business will come your way.

Great presentations will almost always lead to new business. In most cases, your competition will be unwilling or unable to do this... handing you a competitive advantage that will be difficult for them to overcome!

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