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Selling By Seminar

by Wayne Ens

It has been said that "Opportunity is often missed because it comes dressed in overalls and looks too much like work." Facilitating your own customer seminars fits this definition....they are a lot of work, but can pay huge dividends.

Many intelligent consumers today want more than just the cheapest price. These astute customers are seeking to purchase from an expert; someone they feel they can trust for help and advice.

If you want your business to be perceived as professional or as the helpful experts in a given field, consider organizing or facilitating a seminar on your area of expertise or in a related area. For example, a furniture store might run a home decorating seminar and a garden center might facilitate a landscape design session.

The professions, like law, financial advisors and chiropractors, can be huge beneficiaries of seminar campaigns.

One of the best ways to position you or your business as the helpful experts in a given field is to run seminars related to your field.

While seminars or workshops require extra effort, planning and investment, they produce amazing results for a long list of reasons. Here are just three:

1. Pre-qualifying prospects. Unlike some other types of promotions such as trip giveaways, everyone who takes time out of their day to attend your seminar or workshop is pre-qualified. They don't come looking for a sandwich they are seeking help in making purchase decisions in your category.
2. Image and Awareness. Promoting a seminar on a particular topic helps your message stand out from the crowd of 'buy and save' hard-sell advertisers. Promoting self-help or informational seminars sends a huge signal about what you stand for and about your level of expertise.

Educated consumers can be your best customers. Many professions, products and services suffer from misinformation or misunderstandings. Educating consumers about the benefits of your products and services or how they can use those products and services will help destroy any myths and will also result in them spreading word of mouth about your attributes

Scroll down to see the 22 Tips

22 Tips to Make Seminars Work for You

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1. Set a clearly defined goal. Is your mission to encourage do-it-yourselfers to use your products, to generate repeat purchases, clear up misconceptions, or make your services appear more user-friendly? Whatever your goal, write it down and then make sure every element of your presentation steers participants towards that outcome.
2. Set a budget. You'll need extra staff hours. Perhaps equipment, props, chairs, refreshments, handouts, advertising, maybe related door prizes, etc.
3. Tap Vested Interest Suppliers. Your suppliers have a vested interest in your seminar's success as well, be they equipment suppliers for a dentist office, or nursery stock for a garden center. Tap them for products, information and help. Many will supply you with self-help videos, brochures, and even speakers.
4. Consider guest speakers. You need not necessarily be the star attraction. You will get credit for the information and the expertise by virtue of your hosting and presentation. Often community colleges, local authors, industry associations or vested-interest suppliers will provide excellent speakers at no charge.
5. Know the Material. Check industry websites, read available reference material and have other experts on hand if necessary. But here's what's really cool.....the best way to learn is to teach! That's right; the research and rehearsal you do in preparation for your workshop WILL make you an expert.
6. Consider Charging a Fee. Charging a small fee creates a value for your seminar and pre-empts skeptics from thinking it's just another sales gimmick. In the case of a service, like chiropractics, you may want to donate the fee to a related cause like osteoporosis, or a car dealer might donate it to Mothers Against Drunk Driving.
7. Timing - Do not run your seminar during prime selling hours. Depending on the nature of your business; a mid-week after-hours evening or a Saturday morning event might work best for you. Find out when the majority of your prospects would be available to attend.
8. RSVP's are a MUST. Tracking the number of confirmed attendees will prevent you from having to turn away a larger than expected crowd at the door, or having a high-profile speaker show up for a no-show event. If you have too many RSVP's, schedule a second seminar.
9. Consider a Series. Consider running an ongoing series, focusing on one topic at each event. Running a series at the same time, place and at regular intervals will result in attendance or participation growing over time.
10. Promote, Promote, Promote - Remember, you are not running a seminar only for those who attend. Promoting an information session or seminar establishes you as the expert in your field with everyone who hears about it, whether they attend or not.
11. In-house merchandizing - Post notices about the seminar in your place of business and on your website. Make sure your staff knows all about it and has an incentive to bring attention to the seminar with their customers.

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12. Invitations - Print invitations or tickets with a value on them, even if you do not charge that value. Send invitations to your preferred customer list, suppliers, and make sure your staff have some to give to customers.
13. Door Prizes - Offering related door prizes, a year's worth of oil changes at a ladies' auto-care seminar or a free shrub at a lawn care seminar, will improve attendance, and suppliers will generally give you the prize just for the publicity.
14. Promote Tips - Offer simple, helpful insights or tips within the body of your commercials, promoting the event. And consider following up with a campaign of self-help or educational tips on air.
15. Q & A - Always close with a question and answer period, and if a question arises you can't answer, promise to get back to *everyone* in attendance with the answer.....now that's customer service at it's finest!
16. Keep it short and focused. Remember your objective, and stay focused. If the session runs more than one hour, have a short break. Never run more than two hours.
17. Avoid the temptation to hard-sell a captive audience. If you deliver on your seminar promise, attendees will return and they will buy. You can offer an opportunity to buy at the conclusion, but don't hard-sell.
18. Consider related speakers. Helpful related topics will also position you as a helpful expert. For example a realtor might run a seminar facilitated by a home stager or mortgage broker, while a boarding kennel might co-produce a seminar with a veterinary clinic.
19. Media Releases - Issue media releases about the speaker, the topic and the event. We can't guarantee a media release will be published if you send it, we can only guarantee it won't if you don't. If it does get published, it's free!
20. Welcome Students - If you have the room, be a good corporate citizen and welcome a limited number of local students. For example, a garden center might invite students from a local agricultural or horticultural class. You'll look like a hero and win some friends.....not to mention some interesting questions during the Q & A.
21. Evaluations - There is always a better way; find it! Learn what attendees liked and didn't like about your seminar, and get their contact data for your data base. A sample evaluation form is attached.
22. Subsidize – Consider selling sponsorships to relevant suppliers to underwrite your costs. Your radio account executive can help you design saleable sponsorship packages.

One Additional Point

Make sure your staff attends as well. They'll learn something AND make valuable customer contacts.

Need to make your advertising work harder for you?
Contact wayne@wensmedia.com

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