



MARKETING YOUR PROGRAM IS A GIFT TO THE WORLD:
CHANGING YOUR ATTITUDE ABOUT MARKETING AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT FOR YOUR PROGRAM

By Dev Pathik

Are You Spending Too Much Time Outdoors? This may seem like a strange question to pose to outdoor educators and guides but the reality is that too much time outdoors may prevent your program from achieving its full potential. In this case, I refer to your potential for both revenue and service.

So, why might you be spending too much time outdoors? Because unless you have a full time business development person, every hour you spend delivering programs is one less hour you are able to invest in new business development. Sure, your program may be busy providing service to those groups that call you because of word of mouth referrals, but that suggests that you are running a reactive business. It also suggests that there are hundreds or even thousands of other clients that may engage your services or buy your product if you were proactive about reaching them. This article is about developing a new perspective on your marketing efforts.

A New Perspective on Marketing

Over the years, I have had the pleasure of working with many adventure and experiential education businesses and I have seen programs grow and generate phenomenal amounts of revenue. The great thing about growth in our field is that every time a program grows, it means that more people are experiencing the outdoors. So why don't most program directors/managers take a more proactive role towards marketing and outreach?

First, it can be a little hard to know where and how to get started. Knowing how much to spend on a brochure, what your website should do, or what the most successful marketing strategies for businesses like yours requires outside help. However, these questions can be answered with relatively little effort. I believe that the real barriers to growth for most programs are the attitudes that we (as a field) have about sales and marketing. I think that most program managers have never discovered the joy of implementing a truly effective marketing campaign that is perfectly aligned with your program's mission. Yes, I said joy. I am here to tell you that marketing can be fun and that it is the only way that you will reach certain groups.

Think of it this way: Have you ever gone to a movie that, at first, you really weren't all that interested in, only to discover that it was a great movie that you were really glad to have seen? Well, the right information and a good plan for your marketing activities can turn into a great story that is filled with possibilities both for your program and for your participants.

Fact # 1: Today, somewhere in your area, there hundreds if not thousands of individuals that would benefit from an experience on your course.



Fact #2: Some of those people will never have that experience unless you take a proactive role in reaching out to the groups that you want to serve.

Lesson: Business development for your Alpine Tower or adventure complex program is an extension of your service; a way to share what you do. The fact that you may charge a reasonable rate for the experience does not lessen the value of that outreach. It just means that you are going to be around to serve others in the future.

I often describe a proactive marketing campaign as a treasure hunt except that in the Alpine Tower Treasure Hunt, there are dozens if not hundreds of “X’s” (places where treasure awaits you). When you find that treasure, you get the chance to share something incredible with other people. What does that mean? It means that attracting groups to your facility is a gift to your bottom line and to the people who deserve to experience what you offer. It also means that your marketing efforts should be fun and exciting; they can be a way to rally your team around a common goal and then to go out and do great work in the process. I am not suggesting that you go off and begin a poorly developed plan or that you simply do more of something that has been ineffective for your program in the past. I think it is critical that you think of marketing as an extension of your program and therefore your approach must empower the people it touches. So, while traditional sales and marketing efforts may work in other industries, your approach might need to be qualitatively different.

Many of the program directors that I work with view traditional sales and marketing practices as manipulative and disempowering which is in complete opposition to the work that we do as experiential educators. I believe that most of us (experiential educators) see ourselves as teachers and givers. We want to share something with the world. So it follows that the business development programs that we utilize for our programs must also provide us with a way to share something wonderful with the world. What I am saying is that doing what we love as experiential educators comes with some obligation to let others know about it. I also believe that growth is the only way that your program can create long term jobs, support an ever improving lifestyle for you, and, depending on the structure of your organization, provide much needed capital to another department or to your community-based programs.

I know from personal experience and the experience of our clients that you can grow your program with just a few hours per week of focused activity. My points are that we can become more proactive in our marketing efforts, that doing so is a good thing, and that, in today’s economy, your program probably carries much more potential than you are currently leveraging. So get excited about marketing and don’t let that potential go untapped

The Challenge and Adventure Advisory (CAA) is a marketing and business development firm that works with challenge and adventure based businesses to assist them in achieving their potential for service & revenue. To find out more about CAA call (727) 938-3292 or visit us on the web at www.challenge-advisory.com