

Marketing – A Fresh Approach

Enrichment Lectures Offer Solid Lead Generation

By Peter J. Shield PhD, ARP

Some years ago I held the position of director of in-house marketing for a timeshare development in Nevada, U.S.A. I had just returned from Hong Kong, where I was privileged to develop a marketing program for a top U.S.-based timeshare property utilizing the services of more than 40 Hong Kong travel agents. I applied the same principal that I employed in Asia to the Nevada resort guests. Namely to hold an evening presentation focusing on the enormous opportunities enjoyed by timeshare owners in fulfilling their travel dreams through the vehicle we provide. I would liken these presentations to those provided to cruise passengers under the title of “enrichment lectures.”

Those of us who have toiled in this industry for any length of time will be familiar with the fact that most guests who attend presentations do so because of the premium offered by the developer. In most cases these tour participants undergo limited qualification and have no sincere interest in our product.

Consider, if you will, a prospect that sat through your presentation simply because they were anxious to learn more about

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how they could enjoy exciting vacations at magical destinations at a cost they could afford. It was my contention that the clients visiting travel agents were genuinely interested in vacationing. What better prospects for our product!

It has been my experience as a cruise ship lecturer – an occupation I have enjoyed for over 20 years – that those attending an enrichment lecture were of a similar disposition. They were anxious to enrich their lives through the experience of the lecturer. Not only did the “product” gain credibility through the endorsement of the speaker, but



Peter J. Shield tours St. Catherine's Monastery on Egypt's Sinai Peninsula. Shield's enrichment lectures about his travels captivate listeners.

also the audiences were fired up, as it were, to explore further.

On my most recent cruise with Celebrity, I presented a PowerPoint presentation of a visit to Egypt and Jordan. The response was outstanding. Everyone wanted to know how I managed the trip at such a low cost and in

complete safety. Had I been in a position to usher them into a timeshare presentation I'm sure we would have closed 50%! It was this approach that enabled me to increase in-house tour flow in the Nevada project to over 80%, with a 47% closing rate.

It is my considered opinion that major hotel groups such as Hilton, Marriott, Wyndham and even Disney, to name but a few, could profitably offer their resident guests enrichment lectures by creditable presenters with a view to booking mini-vacations or in-house tours (where applicable). The speaker market is such that there is an abundant

supply of authors interested in promoting book sales, who I am sure would be happy to conduct such a lecture program on a results-based compensation package.

The presentations should be designed on a first-person basis incorporating a timeshare vacation component. The intention would be to create an honest desire on the part of members of the audience to explore the travel opportunities presented. Care should be taken to ensure that no recognizable sales pitch is made and that guests perceive that this is an educational/entertaining event.

The lectures should be free of charge and, where appropriate, include snacks or refreshments. Industry posters or displays should be avoided and any displayed material should highlight the credibility of the guest speaker. An attendance register should be maintained where guests can leave their contact details and indicate their interest in receiving follow-up details from the speaker or the resort/hotel sponsoring the event. In some cases the resort/hotel might like to open the invitation to local residents and certainly invite the local media.

In my experience, our industry has been extremely lax in taking advantage of the media and PR opportunities that abound in today's media-hungry society. We have a product that has literally made a positive impact on the lives of millions of vacationers around the world, and yet we still suffer from the stigma of the unscrupulous marketers that went before us and in some cases still linger. As an industry we must continue to explore other marketing opportunities that add credibility to our product and our industry. 📷

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