

How to solicit donations for Active Aging Week events

The promise of “free stuff” usually entices older adults to participate in activities. Here’s how you can offer freebies to your Active Aging Week participants, even when your budget is limited

by Cynthia Roth



You're a host site for Active Aging Week. Congratulations! You recognize the value of promoting a healthy lifestyle to adults ages 50 and older, and you are savvy enough to know that hosting Active Aging Week events may boost your participation levels. By now, you may have made a blueprint of all the fantastic programs you will offer. Now comes the tricky part. How will you attract participants?

Older adults can be tough to target. If your audiences are anything like my Aunt Phyllis—who spent the early years of her life walking to school (uphill both ways) and actually getting up from the couch to change channels—they may be unfamiliar with facility-based exercise and activities. This is not to say they are not open to them.

According to the International Health, Racquet and Sportsclub Association, older adults have been “the defining characteristic of industry change.” Since 1990, the number of health club members over age 55 has increased 314%, and this trend is expected to continue.

In seven years, the youngest Baby Boomers will start turning 50. The generation born between 1946 and 1964, which represents an estimated 78 million people, has continually redefined modern life. Today, these men and women are changing our perceptions of “aging” by holding on to their youthfulness, and advancing the retirement revolution begun by their elders.

Baby Boomers have unparalleled buying power. Smart business owners, like you, are actively seeking the Boomers' business. The current list of advertisers also includes food makers, travel companies, clothing retailers and automakers like Toyota—which is currently running an ad that tells parents life begins once they drop off their kids at college.

However, advertising channels that worked when Boomers were in their 20s and 30s—such as radio advertising and television commercials—are easily bypassed by today's consumer. Technologies like TiVo, iTunes and podcasting have made it simple to escape marketing messages. Leading companies are waking up to this fact. They've learned that older adults have a strong sense of community and make purchasing decisions based on trust. They've realized that to reach this demographic, they need to create marketing campaigns aligned with organizations that have a genuine impact on their consumers' lives.

This is where you come in. As an Active Aging Week host site, you are an expert on active adults. Your facility sees active older men and women everyday. You've established trust and credibility among your current clients, and are actively pursuing new clients by hosting events that encourage aging adults to improve their health. You are the perfect partner for any company that strives to reach out to older adults.

But let's not get ahead of ourselves. You still need to entice people to participate in Active Aging Week. You still have a limited budget. And you're still relying on your programming to sell your events. When faced with these challenges, there are two little words that scream success. Those words? *Free stuff!*

How can you offer “free stuff” to participants when you have a limited budget? By drawing on the principles of cause marketing to create successful partnerships with like-minded businesses.

What is cause marketing?

Cause marketing was developed by nonprofits as a strategy to diversify their funding sources. In the past decade, more and more consumer choices have

been based on values. The *2004 Cone Corporate Citizenship Study*, conducted by Boston-based strategic marketers Cone Inc., reveals that eight in 10 Americans are “very/somewhat likely to switch from one brand to another about the same in price and quality, if the other brand is associated with a cause.” Eight in 10 individuals also say that “corporate support of causes wins their trust in that company, a 21% increase since 1997.” Companies that openly support their customers' values and needs can leverage emotional bonds and earn loyalty.

Smart businesses and corporations began looking for ways to connect with consumers on causes. The first major campaign took place in 1983, when American Express empowered Americans to restore the Statue of Liberty by using their American Express card. For several months, each time a cardholder charged an item, the company donated a penny towards restoring the Statue of Liberty. The result was millions of dollars to refurbish the monument, plus glowing press, consumer goodwill, and increased sales for American Express.

Since then, several such partnerships have sprouted among corporations and nonprofits, and the trend has grown beyond charities. Today, businesses that share a common vision, purpose and target market can pool their resources for extraordinary gains.

Take the lead

Yes, it would be fantastic if your local bakery called you up to say, “Hey, I hear you are hosting an Active Aging Week event. I'd sure love to reach out to active older adults. Would it be okay if I donated lunch and coffee for your event?” But, like most of us, you probably don't live in that perfect world, so you'll need to initiate these partnerships.

Continued on page 42

How to solicit donations for Active Aging Week events

Continued from page 41

Start by asking yourself a few key questions to determine what businesses you will invite to partner with you:

- What type of older adult do I want to attract to my Active Aging Week event(s)?
- Where does this type of older adult shop? Spend their leisure time? Eat?
- What products/services interest them?
- What products/services are available to help them improve their health?
- Are there any businesses within five to 10 miles of my facility that would be interested in my demographic?
- Do I want to offer partners an opportunity to interact with Active Aging Week participants? If so, do I want to organize a mini Health Fair or offer speaking opportunities?

At this point, it's okay to think big. Write it all down. Now, get out your phone book or go online and make a list of businesses to approach. Once you have your list, determine if you have any contacts within these businesses. You may also want to route the list through your facility to see if any colleagues have a relationship with any businesses on your list. It's always easier to create a partnership with someone you are connected to. Plus, a few "yesses" will give you the confidence you need to set up meetings with people you don't know.

What is Active Aging Week?

Active Aging Week, an annual campaign to promote healthy lifestyles, takes place Monday, September 24, through Monday, October 1, 2007. This initiative is spearheaded by the International Council on Active Aging® (ICAA), an association that supports professionals who develop wellness and fitness facilities and services for adults over 50. Turn to pages 34–38 for information about planning Active Aging Week events.

You'll need to look at your current marketing plan to determine what you can offer your partners. Most businesses will want their logos printed on all marketing materials. This will position them as a company concerned about older adult health and wellness. Additional marketing opportunities may include:

- banners or signage at your facility
- company name included as a partner of the Active Aging Week event(s) in any press relations
- the opportunity to interact with participants (a Health Fair, for instance)
- the opportunity to supply product or information to participants (think lunch)
- access to participants' mailing addresses
- company logo printed on event T-shirts, water bottles or other "give-aways"

Before you approach a business, make two easy-to-follow fact sheets. The first one is an overview of Active Aging Week that includes the dates and times of your event(s), information about your facility and the programs you offer, plus information about your participants and their buying power. (See the sample fact sheet on page 45.) This "sales sheet" will show a business clearly why it needs to partner with you. The second sheet identifies marketing opportunities within your event.

Now you're ready to go. It's time to schedule appointments and secure your partnerships. Remember, you are the perfect partner for any company that strives to reach out to older adults. You are presenting a mutually beneficial program that will help you attract participants to your event(s). These participants will see that the event partners value their health and, in turn, will come to trust them. This will guide their future purchasing decisions.

How to make the approach

It's easy to say no to someone over the telephone or through email. That's why you're going to schedule face-to-face meetings. With luck, you were able to identify a contact at each business. Even if these contacts are not decision-makers, call them to find out who to speak to about marketing opportunities. Once you have that information, call those individuals to introduce yourself and give them an overview of the program. Let them know that you'd like to meet with them, in person, for about 30 minutes, and ask what would be a good day or time to stop in. Offer to send information in advance of these meetings, and let them know how grateful you are for their time.

Once a meeting is set, here's how you might approach a local business owner:

You: Hi, Suzy. Thanks for taking the time to meet with me. I want to let you know about a program I am running at my facility that you'll really like.

Owner: Really?

You: Yes. We are hosting an event for Active Aging Week. The goal of my program is to encourage older adults to lead a healthy and active lifestyle. As we age, our health gets more and more important to us. And many older adults are seeking health information, plus a place where they can interact with like-minded people and feel supported. Here's a fact sheet about my event. (Hand fact sheet to prospective partner.)

Owner: Thanks! I've been looking for a way to create some loyalty.

You: Older adults tend to support businesses that support them. That's why I'd like to invite you to partner with me. If you'll donate lunch for 50 people on

Continued on page 44

How to solicit donations for Active Aging Week events

Continued from page 42

DATE AND TIME, I would be happy to include your logo in all my marketing materials, plus give you lots of additional marketing opportunities that will encourage my participants to support your business.

Owner: What else do I have to do? Fifty lunches? I'm not sure I can afford that.

You: I'd be happy to work with you to determine a donation that fits within your budget. All you need to do is agree to supply the food and send me your logo. I'll take care of the rest of the details.

A large product donation may seem a lot to some businesses and may be a "no-brainer" to others. Be prepared for both types of responses. If business owners express concern, suggest a solution such as asking them to donate coupons for a goody bag or a gift certificate for a raffle.

Developing relationships with local businesses will open up many opportunities, so it is extremely important that you fulfill all the marketing opportunities you've promised. In addition, don't forget to stay in touch with your new partner. This will only help you when it comes time to plan for Active Aging Week 2008.

A final lesson from Aunt Phyllis: Send thank-you cards within a week of your event(s). Include photographs of your participants enjoying themselves, and let these businesses know how successful your event was. Put your new partners on your mailing list to keep them abreast of what's happening at your facility. Initiating and maintaining these relationships within your community will help your business—and your partner's—to flourish. ☺

Cynthia Roth has been creating partnerships between corporations, nonprofits and

fitness facilities for seven years. Cynthia has a degree in advertising and public relations from the University of Wisconsin and a Certificate in Fundraising Management from the University of Indiana. As a group fitness instructor, freelance writer and Power Bar, Team Elite Captain, Cynthia is able to leverage relationships and resources to create successful, grassroots marketing strategies.

References

International Health, Racquet and Sportsclub Association. US Health Club Membership by Age. Retrieved on February 9, 2007, from <http://cms.ihrsa.org/IHRSA/viewPage.cfm?pageID=626>.

US Census Bureau. (2006, January 3). Facts for Features & Special Editions: Oldest Baby Boomers Turn 60! Retrieved on February 9, 2007, from http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/facts_for_features_special_editions/006105.html.

Cone, Inc. (2004, December 8). Press release: Multi-Year Study Finds 21% Increase in Americans Who Say Corporate Support of Social Issues is Important in Building Trust. An Overwhelming Majority of Americans Want Companies to Talk More About Their Efforts. Retrieved on February 9, 2007, from http://www.coneinc.com/Pages/pr_30.html.

get involved

Active Aging Week

Sept. 24 to Oct. 1, 2007

Team up with the ICAA to highlight the importance of physical activity and healthy eating for older adults.

To get involved, call
866-335-9777

or visit
www.icaa.cc.



PHILIPS



FACTS ABOUT ACTIVE AGING WEEK

Overview

Active Aging Week was initiated by the International Council on Active Aging (ICAA) to promote the benefits of a healthy lifestyle on a national scale, by giving as many older adults as possible the means to experience activities and exercise in a safe, friendly and fun atmosphere.

Host sites across the United States and Canada include local seniors organizations, retirement communities, seniors centers, health clubs, parks, recreation centers, and age-restricted apartment/condominium complexes. These sites offer a wide range of free activities and events during the weeklong promotion.

Active Aging Week is held each year during the last week of September. In 2007, Monday, September 24 through Monday, October 1 (International Day of Older Persons).

Where: FACILITY NAME is an Active Aging Week host site. FACILITY NAME is located at ADDRESS.

What: FACILITY NAME will offer a Health Fair during Active Aging Week, which will include free health screening and information, talks by local healthy aging experts, demonstrations of fitness equipment, as well as yoga and healthy cooking classes.

When: FACILITY NAME'S Active Aging Health Fair will take place on-site on DATE AND TIME.

Participant demographics:

Active adults ages 55 and older

Did you know?

Baby Boomers, which represent 78 million consumers, have unparalleled buying power. They have a strong sense of community and tend to make purchasing decisions based on trust. In addition, today's consumers buy brands that resonate with their values.

Target businesses:

Mental health professionals: "Older Americans are disproportionately likely to die by suicide"; depression is among the most common conditions linked with suicide in this age group (National Institute of Mental Health, 2003).

Healthy foods/supplements: Eighty-seven percent of older adults have one or more chronic diseases with adverse outcomes that can be improved by nutrition therapy (Institute on Medicine, 2000).