



# Society Strategies

**Federation of Genealogical Societies**

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Series Set III Number 2

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## Set III Strategies for Vice-Presidents

### Ten Ways to Market Your Non-Profit Like a Business

by Linda Herrick Swisher

## Supplemental Page

This strategy paper, written some years ago, is an FGS *Classic* that contains ideas and strategies still relevant today in society management.

This paper offers marketing advice based on for-profit business principles. Ten basic marketing points can be applied to your non-profit society.

The information on page 4 which directs the interested person on how to obtain copies of this paper is incorrect.

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# Society Strategies

Federation of Genealogical Societies

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## Ten Ways to Market Your Non-Profit Like A Business

by Linda Herrick Swisher, Hobart, Indiana

### INTRODUCTION

Is your non-profit group wilting on the vine? Has the term, "non-profit" taken on a new meaning as officers struggle to keep the treasury from drying up? Don't give up, just change your focus. Look to successful businesses for ideas on how to rejuvenate your non-profit through a successful marketing strategy.

Businesses don't grow by themselves. People who run them must carefully cultivate potential customers, growth opportunities, networks and public relations. When the business begins to blossom and grow, everybody benefits. But the seeds must first be planted.

Why run a non-profit like a business? Simple. There are bills to pay, volunteers to keep happy and productive, potential members to educate, other groups doing similar work, and a lot of people who could care less about your group.

There are also limits to the amounts of time

and money that people will spend on volunteer activities. Potential volunteers will shop around to see which group has opportunities to match their interests, which group could best benefit from their involvement, and which group will pay them the most (recognition, a warm fuzzy feeling, other perks like meals, travel, etc.) Your group is a product. Sell it!

You've already read how-to books on genealogy. Now it's time to gather some how-to advice on marketing. The following are ten basic marketing principles which can be applied to your not-for-profit society, library or museum.

### Principle 1

#### BELIEVE IN YOUR PRODUCT

How can you convince people to join a group if you never attend a meeting, work on projects, get excited or encourage fresh ideas? Sometimes involving existing members in a

common cause or a worth-while project is the shortest road to revitalization (see Principle 6 for suggestions on what might inspire even the most reserved member.)

### **Principle 2**

#### **CONDUCT A SURVEY/FOCUS GROUP**

Are people interested in your cause? Do they know you exist, and what are you about? Ask people for their opinions. Are they happy with you, angry with you, or indifferent to you? Ask opinions of customers (members) and non-customers. If lots of people have “no opinion” of your group, or have never *heard* of you, you’ve got some selling to do!

### **Principle 3**

#### **ANALYZE YOUR STRENGTHS; ASSESS YOUR WEAKNESSES**

You cannot be everything to everybody. You will spread your resources too thin. But you should ask, what do you offer a member? How can you maximize the benefits? How does your “product” compare with that of another group? Build on your strengths and consider how difficult it would be to eliminate the weaknesses or lessen their importance. How can you turn a weakness into a strength?

### **Principle 4**

#### **DO SOME COMPARATIVE SHOPPING**

Who is your competition? Does another group do what you do? Do they do it better, cheaper, or more successfully? Do their members receive more benefits? How can you implement changes to even the playing field?

### **Principle 5**

#### **BRAINSTORM STRATEGIES**

Gather the troops and have a round table discussion on such matters as fundraising or member retention. No matter how bizarre or improbable the ideas, write them all down, and consider one. All members need to know that their input is appreciated. Don’t discard any ideas too quickly, but look for ways to incorporate elements of those ideas. Perhaps a combination of ideas will work best. An idea that is not appropriate now may be just the ticket in six months!

### **Principle 6**

#### **FIND A NICHE/NEED AND FILL IT**

What can you offer that people will want to join or pay for? What do you do that nobody else does? Is there a community service project you can undertake, such as restoring a small cemetery or honoring “first families?” Do you hold classes, take field trips, or have a library? Do you collect data on a particular place or name? Have the primary records of your local area been published? Has the information on early pioneers been assembled?

### **Principle 7**

#### **TARGET YOUR CUSTOMERS**

Who would use your services or belong to your group? Seniors, teachers, scout troops, 4-H, historic preservationists, librarians, community leaders, etc. should all be approached. An additional suggestion is that you check the national or state quarterlies for queries pertaining to the geographical area/surname your group features. Who submitted these queries and are they members of your group?

Send them a letter and a membership brochure. Chances are they don't know you exist, and will appreciate learning about your group.

### **Principle 8**

#### **PREPARE YOUR "SALES PITCH"**

Different people will want to use your services or belong to your group for different reasons. Your "marketers" are those in your speakers bureau. If your group doesn't have one, start one! Develop a list of topics your speakers bureau could talk about. If necessary, train your own speakers on what they need to know. Tailor presentations to pique the interest of your customers. (Seniors will not be interested in earning a merit badge. Scouts may not be old enough to appreciate a talk on writing their memoirs.) Your "sales pitch" is also your membership brochure and other group literature, such as newsletters or quarterlies. Liven them up with colored paper or an attractive logo. Such a "signature" readily identifies your group.

### **Principle 9**

#### **KNOW WHEN TO CLOSE**

After you've delivered your pitch or talk, and kindled people's curiosity, know when to stop. Don't "data dump" all your benefits, programs, etc. at one sitting. Leave time to answer questions. If you think there won't be any questions, you might want to "prepare" some questions in advance, then ask and answer them yourself. ("You might be wondering how we transcribe cemeteries. This is what we do...")

### **Principle 10**

#### **ASK FOR THE SALE**

Ask a member to volunteer. Ask a visitor to join. Ask a community group for funding. After communicating your message, tell people what you want them to do.

#### **Conclusion**

Businesses (and non-profits) fold every day. Only the strong survive. Your group can be one of the survivors if you apply sound business strategies to your non-profit society. You will help insure that it will not only survive, but flourish.

[Linda Herrick Swisher is Publicity Chair and 1995 Conference Chair for the Indiana Genealogical Society. She has served the South Suburban (IL) Genealogical and Historical Society in various capacities. Linda is a columnist for *Ancestry* magazine and a staff assistant for the Dimensions section of Star Newspapers in Chicago Heights, Illinois. See also, her article "Improve Your Society's Public Relations: Ten Areas to Watch" *FORUM* 5:3 (Fall 1993);22.]

SUGGESTIONS FOR A MEMBERSHIP BROCHURE

- Society Name, Address, Telephone/Fax/e-mail Numbers, Logo, and Geographic Area Service  
The logo belongs on the front panel as this is your group's signature. The panel should reveal the state or region the group represents, i.e., "White County Genealogical Society" could be from any state as could "Tri-County Society." Note: the society's address should not change every time there is a change in officers. Strive to maintain a permanent address even if you must pay for a post office box annually.
- Lists of Projects, Current and Completed  
Publications: strengths or specialties of your group (the oldest, the largest, etc.). Hours if you have a library. Dates of meetings ("2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday of the month except in December").
- Quotes from Satisfied Members on Benefits  
Be sure to include out-of-state members as well. List the society's offerings: newsletter, quarterly, free queries, discounts on publications, research service, membership in the Federation of Genealogical Societies (thus providing your members a *FORUM* subscription at the reduced rate), etc.
- Photos/Illustrations of Library, Office, Officers  
If you have a library or a permanent meeting site, include a brief, uncomplicated map showing access and parking with written directions as well. People will keep this type of reference handy.
- Membership Form  
Include some type of membership form for "impulse buyers." Someone who picks up the brochure and immediately wants to join but has to write for details will probably never get beyond the "intent" stage. Consider making a form that can easily be reproduced on a copy machine, thus keeping the brochure intact. Otherwise, be sure the tear-off form does not subtract critical information.
- Revision Date  
As with any form or brochure, keep the revision date in an obscure place. This allows you to evaluate old stock and replace it with new information easily.
- Distribution  
Your brochure can be distributed to: libraries, archives, courthouses, chambers of commerce, convention and visitors bureaus, tourist welcome centers, museums, antique stores, historical societies, historic sites, and with each outgoing letter from your society. Make them available at all meetings and to your speakers bureau. Be sure the brochure fits in a #10 envelope. A tri-fold works best.

*We hope you find the ideas in the Paper useful. It is from a Series of six individual sets.*

SET I.	STRATEGIES FOR SOCIETIES
SET II.	STRATEGIES FOR PRESIDENTS
SET III.	STRATEGIES FOR VICE-PRESIDENTS
SET IV.	STRATEGIES FOR TREASURERS
SET V.	STRATEGIES FOR SECRETARIES
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