

## Introduction to Customer Evangelism

When a new Krispy Kreme donut store announces its opening date people go crazy. The night before the opening, you'll find them camping out on the pavements, curled up in sleeping bags to keep out the cold night air, in an effort to be the very first person in town to sink their teeth into the warm, soft, delectable donuts.

And it's not just about the taste. A visit to the Krispy Kreme store is an entire experience. Standing in line, watching the mechanical arms and movements of the massive robotic machine preparing the donuts; inhaling the sweet scent of the delicacy to come; the anticipation and rumbling stomach; tasting free samples of new varieties handed out by the staff at the counter, and then the final sale. Carrying away that hot, piping paper bag, full of the fattening, sinful, but heavenly goodies.

Krispy Kreme is one of the best examples of customer evangelism in the country - it is a marketing phenomenon, where its customers ARE its sales force. And customer evangelism is the latest buzz in marketing. Marketing professionals are now recognizing that people are over-saturated with advertising. The individual is exposed to an average of more than 3,000 advertising messages every day. We are tuning-out advertising, and advertising is losing its effectiveness. What marketing professionals are finding is that word-of-mouth really does work!

The customer evangelist concept is very exciting and appropriate for Sweet Adelines. Like Krispy Kreme, we are selling an experience, rather than an off-the-shelf product. We are selling more than just singing, more than just a hobby: It's a lifestyle!

You will hear a lot about customer evangelism in the coming months, but this is a brief overview to keep you informed, and get your minds in gear.

The book, *Creating Customer Evangelists* (by Jackie Huba and Ben McConnell) shows us how to convert loyal customers into a volunteer sales force. The six tenets of customer evangelism are:

1. Continuously gather customer feedback.
2. Share knowledge freely with the customer.
3. Build the buzz. Expertly build word of mouth networks.
4. Create communities where customers meet and share.
5. Offer bite-size pieces, smaller offerings to get customers onboard.
6. Create a cause the customer can support. Focus on making the world a better place.

### **Customer Feedback**

We must know what our members are saying and how they are feeling about the organization. Armed with this information, we are able to make changes for the better. Can you imagine how successful a company would be if it gave its customers exactly what they wanted? It couldn't fail.

### **Sharing Knowledge**

Trust between the organization and the member is important if we want our members to successfully sell memberships. Sharing knowledge openly builds strong trust in a relatively short time. The member begins to feel that she is a valuable part of the organization. When a member feels she is privy to new information that few others have access to, she will feel important and want to go out and tell others about it. We can use these motivated individuals to our advantage. It's a win-win situation.

### **Creating the Buzz**

This is the most fun! Thinking of ways to inspire and excite our members, generating a buzz. For example, when the SING eZine was launched, that created a great buzz among members. It seemed everyone was talking about the eZine. "Did you get the eZine?" "Send an e-mail to Jane to get yours." "Don't miss out!" This buzz motivates members, gets them enthusiastic all over again so they are excited to be a part of it, and they can't wait to talk about the organization with others.

### **Communities**

Sweet Adelines already has several communities the members have created amongst themselves, such as the SING List on Yahoo and the MMC list. We should encourage and support these groups, and occasionally contribute opinions ourselves.

### **Bite-size Pieces**

An example of bite-size pieces would be offering free singing lessons to get prospects through the door. The decision to join in with a free singing lesson (or "newcomers' class") is almost a "no-brainer." Who can say no to something that's free? Once the prospect is in the door, we need to offer a series of small no-brainers and special offers up to the point where the prospect decides to become a member.

### **Creating a Cause**

Creating a cause gives members a warm, fuzzy feeling inside. Donating chorus talent to perform at a fundraiser makes members feel proud to be a part of this organization, and strengthens their passion for Sweet Adelines.

### **In Summary**

The idea of customer evangelism is that we make our members so completely happy and excited about being a member, that they can't wait to go out and tell everyone how wonderful it is and that they should join.

We have almost 30,000 of the best salespeople ever – just waiting to work for us. Most of them are already proud to be a part of this. All we need to do is fire them up. We need to get our members enthused and buzzing. Then, when we release them on "The Public" – WATCH OUT!

*NB: Creating Customer Evangelists, by Jackie Huba and Ben McConnell is available at Barnes and Noble and Amazon.com.*