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## Community Marketing, Does It Work?

By *Sophie Braccini*



Community event at Aegis where business owners and town officials meet Photo courtesy Moraga Chamber of Commerce

Some say it works, others say it doesn't, there are books written about it and opinions galore. "It" is community marketing, or how to engage and cultivate business in the communities that naturally congregate around one's product and/or service. In Lamorinda it typically takes the form of business owners giving their time to community activities and/or contributing goods and services to community functions. For business owners, it is part of a virtuous circle where what you give will come back to you in many different ways.

Grant Stubblefield started his business as a result of his community involvement. Fresh out of St Mary's College, he joined the Moraga Chamber of Commerce and helped implement the Shop Moraga First campaign. His volunteer activities led to the startup of his own business, naturally called, "Community Marketing."

Getting around and helping out has been Roos Pal's modus operandi even before buying Terzetto Restaurant in the Moraga Shopping Center. "I always wanted to do social work," says Pal, "so I joined Kiwanis." Pal believes that her social activism is what has made her business successful. "I serve on the Parks Foundation, I support the Chamber of Commerce and I enjoy it," she says. "Roos does things right," comments Stubblefield, quipping, "Don't ask what the community can do for you, ask what you can do for your community."

Jay Lifson of the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce says, "That's what chambers do, connecting people to people." Lifson believes that most people get involved

with volunteerism because they decide it's the right thing to do or because they've been asked to help out, but that they should not be looking for immediate rewards. "The only pay-back one should expect is an opportunity to help," he says, adding that he's seen that people often get back more than what they've invested.

"In Lafayette the quantity of businesses that have been practicing community marketing is innumerable," says Lifson. Business owners such as Ed Stokes (Diablo Foods), Mike Reardon (Oakwood Athletic Club), Dave Arghandiwal (Casa Gourmet Burrito), Anthony Ruiz (Fastframe) and Mo Levich (Generations in Jazz), among others, each give their expertise, time, and donations whenever they can.

Keith Miller, the President of the Orinda Chamber of Commerce and a real estate agent, follows the same credo. "When I joined the Chamber of Commerce, I had no idea what it could really do for me," states Miller, "but now after so many years of networking I'm convinced of its importance and try to persuade my agents to join." Miller offers Carlos Rangle, of Shelby's Restaurant, as a good example of someone who gives his time and energy to the community. "He was on our Board of Directors and always contributes to our events."

In Orinda, another example is the venerable Orinda Motors owned by Allen Pennebaker. Allen, in conjunction with his marketing strategist John Vanek, continues a proud tradition of community service. "This is our way of giving back to the community that makes us successful," says Vanek, "it is not something for which a precise return on investment can be quantified, but we've always seen it as the right thing to do."

Orinda Motors is reaching out to the entire Lamorinda community and has joined both the Moraga and Lafayette Chambers. "There, we meet people we can work with and support each other," says Vanek, "it is important to keep the money in the community and spend it where it will come back to you."

Keeping the money in the community is something that Bill Snider, owner of Moraga Hardware, couldn't agree with more. "It's not only about shopping Lamorinda first," says Snider, who actively supports local schools and clubs, "it's about supporting local business owners who give back to the community every day."

But Snider has concerns about the effectiveness of community marketing. "When people lose their jobs they look at every way possible to save money. When they need something they may not consider who's supporting their schools or their local clubs. They go where they think they will save money." Snider says that people too often have not enough consideration for value added service, community contribution or the long term benefits of supporting locally-owned businesses. "They may not realize that the true cost of a product is not what you pay for at the register," he adds.

Andy Scheck, a marketing expert and publisher of the Lamorinda Weekly, agrees that community marketing is not a panacea for all businesses at all times. "You need to consider how many customers you need per day and how quickly you need to contact them," says Scheck, "for example, if you have a two-day sale on milk, community marketing will not do you much good; but if you are a mortgage broker, networking in your community is key."

Scheck adds that word of mouth is often more useful to businesses that provide an experience people like to talk about, like a restaurant. "Community marketing is a long term investment that's very important, but most of the time, it is only a part of each business' unique marketing mix," he concludes.

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