

# Focusing

Relationship marketing, using event photos, videos, and electronic communications, leads to powerful connections and stronger bonds with customers old and new.

BY CHRISTOPHER JONES

“There is a maxim in the advertising business that an advertisement must be seen at least six times to be effective. That is a useful lesson for Coca-Cola or Nike, who have hundreds of millions of dollars to spend on marketing and can afford to saturate all forms of media with their message. But that is not at all useful, say, for a small group of people trying to spark a literacy epidemic with a small budget.”

*Malcolm Gladwell, The Tipping Point*

Vacation ownership marketing professionals have always been confronted with this major challenge: designing campaigns that generate prospects and more deeply involve current owners and members. But with revenues shrinking and bottom lines scrutinized with ever-greater intensity, it's even more critical to meet these challenges in a measurable way. How is success of a program calculated? How is a connection with potential customers made and capitalized upon? How can companies ensure that the results justify costs? Marketing promotions can no longer be simply a PR and visibility tool. To satisfy goals and sales results, marketers *must* show a strong return on investment.

Permission-based marketing — based on an established relationship — is a key tool for success in this new world of business.

When Seth Godin (author of *Tribes* and *The Dip*) popularized the term “permission-based marketing,” he described the strategy as a bit like dating. You don't head straight for City Hall to sign a marriage license. You build relationships by sharing commonalities, participating in like activities, talking in the same “language,” and identifying interests and values important to both of you. You take it step-by-step and you keep your commitments, until — eventually — you form a solid relationship with the other person.

The core objectives of permission-based marketing in the world of business are no different, and alliances formed through shared values and interests can be both genuine and, needless to say, very cost-effective. When you have a relationship with customers, you also have “permission” to communicate with them multiple times — your contact is perceived as welcome information rather than an interruption or invasion.



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# on the Big Picture



**“People don’t build relationships with products based on the dictates of mass advertising.”**

**Steven Johnson**  
**Everything Bad is Good for You**

Bottom-line: To gain permission, you must have a real reason for a relationship.

If a company wants to connect with people who like to travel, for example, it only makes sense to approach people who have a history of travel, seeking lists of those who take frequent air trips, subscribe to a travel magazine, or frequently attend events that may require travel — whether golf tournaments, sports competitions, learning clinics, or cooking workshops.

Some challenges restrict marketing efforts, however. Companies are tethered by do-not-call lists that eliminate huge databases of likely prospects. Targeted lists are increasingly difficult to access and maintain.

Additionally, despite contradicting reports about the “dumbing down” of the American public, people’s awareness IQs are increasing. Television broadcasts multi-layered programs with product placement as an integral part of the show. But folks are skillful at discriminating what is true and what is hype. That’s why permission-based events such as voting for MLB’s All Star Team or *American Idol* contestants give sponsors the opportunity to engage their marketing base with products and offers that fit their wants and needs.

Resort development companies, marketing teams, and sponsors of all types have long been building permission-type marketing programs at events. Earlier low-tech programs reached out to basic demographics (couples 25 to 65, household incomes of US\$50,000-plus) with box programs in locations ranging from dry cleaners to yogurt stores. With the advent of more sophisticated qualifications and more high-tech data entry allowing input at more efficient levels, timeshare companies began taking on large events such as fairs and shows.

**“If you can generate a reaction in consumers . . . you’ve become a part of their life in that small but critical moment. If you use that moment to land a solid message somewhere on the brain — a message grounded in your brand identity and values — then you’ve truly achieved a great deal.”**

**Lynda Resnick**  
**Rubies in the Orchard**

Today, we have a tremendous opportunity to connect with top-level customers during all sorts of events. This runs the gamut from taking team or action photos

at a hockey event or softball tournament, to videotaping an amateur's golf swing on a signature hole at a pro-am. Capturing the customer experiences at events that target their interests can then be combined with engaging the individual along with the full complement of traditional promotional methods, including indirect marketing campaigns designed to draw targeted Web site traffic from prospective clients.

For instance, the Calgary Flames takes photos of fans with their team mascot; Callaway Golf Company and Storm Bowling take videos of participants at tournaments and clinics; and organizations such as Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority, the American Resort Development Association (ARDA), and Scotiabank have used videos to leverage their marketing dollars at golf events, trade shows, charity functions, and grand openings. Scotiabank, for example, reported 5,187 unique e-mails captured after offering fans the opportunity to have their photo taken with the Stanley Cup. Even more impressive was the fact that 1,719 people forwarded their picture to 5,185 unique people not at the event. Web site traffic resulted in more than 30,000 repeat visits to the Scotiabank Web site.

**“People are most interested in themselves.”**

*Dale Carnegie  
How to Win Friends and Influence People (1931)*

See Your Game® USA Inc., a leading interactive event marketing company, has zeroed in on a way to build relationships using the next generation of digital marketing. Following the permission-based model, the company involves customers in an activity and invites them to have their image captured. Understanding that people are inherently drawn to pictures and videos of themselves, See Your Game attracts individual customers in order to build long-term rapport. The system is readily scalable to establish direct connections with hundreds of thousands of potential owners of timeshare, fractional, and private residence club products. The technology

employed helps companies get customers at a lower cost and faster rate than was previously possible.

The consumer-centered technology begins with personal contact at some type of event. A recent golf tournament sponsored by Wells Fargo works as a useful case study:

Wells Fargo sponsored the tournament to build relationships with realtors and land brokers and to increase brand awareness. Custom-branded Wells Fargo freeze-frame action photo booklets were distributed on-site to players. Full-motion swing videos and stills were uploaded to the Internet to be presented to tournament participants through the Wells Fargo Web site. Then, a branded e-mail campaign invited them to view themselves online. Advanced software capabilities allowed for response tracking of the 124 participants who gave their permission to take part. In this case, the service was more than justified by the US\$3 million loan secured as a direct result of the sponsorship.

**“At best, most advertising skims the surface of our consciousness before we move right past it. . . . Estimates of the number of messages the average consumer confronts in a day vary from 250 to 5,000.”**

*Malcolm Gladwell  
The Tipping Point*

Noting the assertion that a marketing message needs to be seen at least six times before it makes an impact, reports that 80 to 90 percent of event participants visit a sponsor's Web site multiple times are remarkable. Some return as many as 30 to 40 times to check out their pictures and video. See Your Game's records (which include segmenting leads, identifying frequent visitors, and building campaigns based on visitors' interests) report that 30 percent of those who go to the site forward their images to non-event attendees. To put this into perspective, direct-mail specialists are pleased with a



## About Christopher Jones

Christopher Jones is the president of See Your Game® USA Inc., a leading interactive

event marketing company that helps its clients make meaningful connections and lasting relationships with consumers. The company uses proprietary software to create interactive event marketing programs and Web campaigns. See Your Game also licenses qualified territories, corporations, and venues to deliver See Your Game services.

Previously, Jones was vice president of the Western region for Resort Funding LLC, a financing and servicing company specializing in the vacation ownership industry.

Jones spent 15 years as vice president, resort sales and service, for Interval International. He is a Registered Resort Professional (RRP), the American Resort Development Association's (ARDA) highest individual designation. A participant in ARDA for more than 27 years, he serves on the ARDA Meetings Committee. In addition, he is active in ARDA Arizona, California, Hawaii, and Nevada, and the Canadian Resort Development Association (CRDA).

Jones is a graduate of the University of Montana and earned his law degree at the Thomas Jefferson School of Law. He has been a member of the California State Bar since 1978 and has authored several articles on various aspects of vacation ownership.

2-percent response rate.

When sponsors use this technology, they are building an interactive relationship. This is not about just putting your name on a billboard for six hours or handing out incentives or premiums — it's about starting a meaningful bond with consumers.

The opportunities for attracting traffic are endless: local and regional events, sports competitions, charity events, trade shows, theme parks, OPC locations, and even on-site at resorts. Not only does the participant receive an immediate, personalized souvenir of the event, but the relationship between the company and the customer continues via a strategically timed follow-up e-mail campaign drawing the customer to a unique URL featuring his favorite subject — himself — and delivering a custom message or special offer.

The benefits of putting a brand name on a marquis event are quite clear: generating prestige and international exposure to audiences in the hundreds of millions. But justifying the costs of sponsoring an event of this caliber is not

easy. Marketers need an actual, measurable return on their investment. No matter the size or visibility of the event, from a local Little League tournament to an acclaimed charity golf game, obtaining consumer permission and connecting to create a relationship builds a deep and valuable marketing base.

See Your Game implements this strategy and provides the tools to follow up with targeted e-mails, all while delivering content that enhances the consumer experience. With the mass-media marketplace increasingly crowded, businesses are finding it more and more difficult to stand out. Enhancing bonds with current customers and establishing relationships with prospective ones is key to success, particularly for the vacation ownership industry. With a technology solution designed specifically to achieve these goals, permission-based marketing with detailed reporting allows marketers to form new, powerful connections with potential clients and achieve measurable results from their marketing dollars. **■**