

Advising a Changing World ▼

Out Of The Dinner Seminar Box

Getting in front of qualified prospects today



by **Aamir Chalisa**

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As a Branch Manager of a growing insurance and financial services distribution organization, I spend a good deal of time introducing agents to new ways to get in front of the right people at the right

time every single day. Our business is based on one-on-one relationships with individuals, their families and businesses. However, one of the keys to success is to establish this trust within group settings.

For many, this strategy has revolved around dinner seminars or other more expensive and involved events, which incur the costs of mailings, food and space. Instead of this approach, I am encouraging my agents to get out of the seminar dinner box, to meet and share their expertise in front of groups of people in more intimate social settings, educational venues and through radio broadcast opportunities.

Let me provide some specific successes.

Coffee Shop Talks

One of my agents, Tom Jones, an up and coming financial leader, is using the ABC Planning Workshop developed by Dave Vick, a principal with Dressander & Associates (an Independent Marketing Organization). He is President and CEO of Vick & Associates and well-known for teaching and training producers on marketing and

sales techniques. Tom is experimenting with how to use the ABC's of Conservative Planning with smaller, more engaged groups of qualified prospects. His goal is to establish a reputation for presentations that are low key, non-threatening and educational... a good way to learn about and take action on your investment portfolio.

Tom has implemented a series of "Coffee Shop" events for clients and their friends. He invites a number of clients to come to a local coffee shop for a short talk on how to manage risk in their investment portfolios using ABC Planning. He also requests that clients bring a friend, family member or colleague. Through an arrangement with popular spots locally, he secures enough room for up to 15 people, but the event is held in the public arena versus a private setting. Because it is held in public, and by design, others who just happen to be at the shop can listen to Tom's talk. This further builds his reputation and brand in the communities he's serving.

Tom treats his guests to coffee and snacks, and opens the session by breaking the ice with a trivia game and small prizes. He then spends about 20 minutes introducing the ideas of conservative investing behind the ABC Planning program. The rest is all Q&A, discussion and networking. Tom emphasizes the "no pressure" aspect to his practice as he collects names and email addresses of those who want to keep in touch. He offers free one-on-one meetings to address specific personal issue, one hour follow up consultations with individual attendees. These are focused on how the potential client can put the concepts of ABC Planning into their own financial lives.

Tom also asks for signatures from attendees who say "no thanks" to a meeting, but who want to be on a mailing list. This frees him to "drip" information through e-mail in a compliant manner. The kinds of communications he sends out varies from important financial news or tips to funny jokes about tax time to seasonal greetings such

as spring planting ideas or St. Patrick's Day recipes. The goal always is to create a rapport with people, to connect with them and build a strong relationship.

Generally, these events cost about \$200, but they have more than paid for themselves in commissions and relationships with new clients. Tom is currently planning and implementing about 3 coffee shop talks a month at different venues and at different times (morning for retirees and early evenings for pre-retirees). He will add Dinner Seminars, which attract about 20-25 people and follows this up with "drip marketing" to invite people from this group to the coffee shop talks and other events. This strategy creates a cycle of inviting people and expanding the invitation list.

Tom's clients have also been very helpful in giving him names of neighbors, family, friends and business contacts to invite. "Once you get your clients involved in these events, they show great loyalty and enthusiasm for finding qualified people for you to invite. They become partners with you," explains Tom. "The key is to steer clear of any product push and to focus on being educational, brief, and personable. My goal is to have my clients tell their friends that they 'gotta see my financial guy'."

Educational Workshops at Local Venues & Networking with Chambers of Commerce

Our branch approach to supporting agents in finding qualified prospects is to help them implement a number of activities that will keep them in front of larger groups of people in different ways and through different media

Bob Nash, an experienced agent in our branch, is building his brand through booths at expos in senior communities and other events. His booth features simple materials on financial topics of interest as well as raffles and drawings to secure names and contact information. In addition, he is creating a series of educational seminars, again using the ABC Planning approach, which he will hold at local churches and libraries and invite people he meets from the expos. The educational program is spread out over 3 evenings with about 2 hours of content shared at each session.

He charges a small fee to attend and access the materials, but gives that fee back to the church or library as a donation which makes the local venue more invested in the success of the event. And, when a participant pays a fee there is an implicit acceptance of the value expected. People who pay for something – even a small amount — show up! The people involved at the venues post announcements in their bulletins, newsletters and flyers which shows their support and gets the word out. It also adds a great deal of credibility to Bob and his services.

Bob attributes a large part of his success to his active relationship with the Chamber of Commerce. He networks with members several times a month both at lunch meetings and after hours events. He also volunteers his talents as a musician by playing guitar at the annual barbeque. His goal is to be in front of groups of people regularly— giving him the opportunity to talk about what he does, offer timely financial education, and share his personality. It's never about product. It's always about service and relationships.

Try a Radio Ad Campaign

Our branch approach to supporting agents in finding qualified prospects is to help them implement a number of activities that will keep them in front of larger groups of people in different ways and through different media. Recently, one of our strong and experienced agents, Rajini Saggar, tried a proven radio campaign to collect leads and increase activity. One of the leads from the campaign led to a wonderful new relationship and resulted in significant life and long-term care insurance protection sales with another opportunity for using annuities to meet the couple's retirement goals.

After spending about 20 minutes on the phone with the husband who responded to the ad, Rajini spent more time listening than speaking. Using friendly but probing questions, she let the prospect

share information on net worth, age, occupation, retirement, their three children and initial needs such as long term care and retirement. She learned that the couple had two life insurance policies. One covered the wife for \$1 million and one policy covered the husband for \$500,000. Intrigued by why the wife had more coverage than the husband, Rajini suggested that they meet and since the couple's home was not far from her she offered to meet them there. The husband suggested they meet at her office to "save her gas", signally to Rajini that this potential client was thoughtful – just the kind of person she likes to work with.

Rajini's natural approach to keeping things simple, but being prepared with a nice package of information for what the couple seemed to be interested in, served her well. She learned that the husband had more insurance than what he had revealed on the phone, and he was interested in increasing the amounts for himself and his wife.

In addition, she worked with them to deliver long-term care insurance coverage, which they both felt was important to have. She also reviewed their current annuity coverage, but advised them to keep their contracts until they matured to avoid any surrender costs. "I believe my approach of going slowly and looking at one need at a time was refreshing and appealing to this couple. They saw that I was not after a quick sale," she explained.

Rajini, who has built a large client base over the last 20 years, typically only works from referrals, especially from the many doctors and medical professionals she has cultivated. Yet, the idea of trying new marketing strategies such as the radio campaign and the coffee shop seminars appeals to her business philosophy of "make a friend, make a family" with a goal of helping as many people as possible.

No matter where you are in your financial service career, there is always room for growth, innovation and marketing "outside of the box". The key is to increase your activities in ways that get you in front of people who will benefit from your expertise and services. Conducting smaller, more casual coffee shop seminars instead of more formal dinner events or making connections to prospects working with local libraries, houses of worship and Chambers of Commerce through educational workshops are great opportunities to build your brand and meet people who need you. And, even if you are highly experienced and focused on referrals, sometimes trying something different, such as a radio campaign, can pay for itself many times over by meeting just a few more qualified people. ❖