



League Marketing

NDA Dart Summit Ideas Bring Great Rewards to Williams Enterprises

How do you capture the names of potential players? Want to learn how to gain more than 4,500 prospects for little or no money? Read on and find out how one Charter Holder did just that with tips from Dart Summit.

After attending the NDA Dart Summit in Scottsdale, Arizona, Sam Westgate of Williams Enterprises, Inc. took the ideas presented by Ray Tuttle and put them to work in his own company. Ray's presentation on marketing within the league system offered an interesting idea for gathering names and addresses from more than just your regular league participants, but also your casual dart players and location patrons. Rather than relying on locations to compile this information, Ray gave some suggestions on how, you, the Charter Holder could get the job done successfully.

Upon his return from Dart Summit, Sam decided to set several goals that were a direct result of the Summit seminars. The goals were:

1. Drive existing customer base back into locations on a short term basis.
2. Attract new faces and potentially new customers into locations.
3. Develop a database of names, addresses and email addresses of the customers and potential customers who visited locations during the first phase of the promotion.
4. Develop the promotion to identify the game preference, if any, of the participants.
5. Develop the promotion to identify the specific response levels of the participants.
6. Utilize the database to keep attracting customers for repeat visits and to attract new customers into locations.
7. Attempt to keep actual costs and workload to a minimum.

Phase 1 - Setup of the promotion

10,000 tickets were printed for a drawing for a used Pub Time 2+2 coin-op dart board to be given away. The tickets were numbered and tracked by which group went to each location. In order to entice participants to include their e-mail addresses, the tickets stated that the winner would be notified by e-mail. Locations were told to offer their e-mail address if an entrant did not have one. The rules allowed for an individual to enter one ticket during a little more than a 4-week period. Employees of a location were permitted to enter, but only at a different location. The rules also stated that Williams would provide free delivery in their market area only.

Expenses were covered by asking locations to contribute \$25 toward advertising and management costs. Sam states, *"It has long been my belief that if you give your location something, they will not promote it or respect it. However, if they pay a small fee for a service then they in effect 'own' a piece of it and will gladly put out the effort needed to make it a success, ensuring that they get their money's worth.*

41 locations participated in the first giveaway at Williams Enterprises but only after each owner was told of the entire plan and the goals of the promotion; specifically, the utilization of the database for marketing leagues, tournaments and location events. Newspaper ads were purchased in several area newspapers after Sam realized he could purchase the same ad in several area papers at one time for a discounted price. These ads touted the promotion and listed the names of the locations where tickets could be found.

Phase 2 - OK we're rolling...now what?

As the promotion began, it became necessary to pickup entries on a daily basis at some locations while others showed only a slight response rate. It was found that location attitude was the primary factor to success. Successful locations placed the entry jug with the flyer taped to it right on the bar and bartenders handed tickets to customers as they entered the bar. Some had flyers taped to the front door and some to the bathroom walls. After visiting some less enthusiastic locations, a flyer was sent out giving them ideas on how to make the promotion more successful. In addition, they were given more flyers to post in other areas of their establishment.

As the entries began coming in, Williams setup a database on a computer in its office to enter all the names, addresses and e-mail addresses. The database was setup so that if they attempted to enter a name twice, then the "address" came up to allow them to see if it was a duplicate or not. They also tracked the locations where entries were received and the number of entries per individual. This data entry task was easily handled by a high school student on a part-time basis.

By the second week of the promotion, it was evident that Williams needed more tickets and another 10,000 were ordered. *By the end of the entry deadline they had collected over 16,000 entries, over 4,500 unique names and addresses and over 1,000 e-mail addresses.*

A drawing for the site of the dart board drawing was held at a previously scheduled event that Williams hosted for its customers - a baseball trip that took place during the promotion. The location that was drawn was selected to host the drawing for the dart game. By coincidence, the location owner had already hired a radio station to do a live radio remote on the day of the drawing. Sam said, "Well, how lucky could I be?" Since this drawing, it has become a requirement that the location where future drawings will be held must agree to hire a live radio remote.

Phase 3 - Pay dirt!

Williams had already contacted participating locations to get a list of their upcoming events and tournaments, etc. These events, as well as the next drawing to be held (giving away a used coin-operated pool table) and their own events, leagues and tournaments, were promoted on 11"x17" that were tri-folded and mailed to all in the database. As would be expected, all of the addresses were not valid. By mailing out the first set of flyers right away, Williams was able to remove invalid addresses from the approximately 100 returned flyers. In addition, they used their e-mail list server to e-mail the same information to all who had addresses. Likewise, the e-mail list was reduced to about 800 valid e-mail addresses.

Subsequent listings of location events are posted in the bulletin board section of Williams' Web site and e-mailed to those in the database on a monthly basis. Flyers are now delivered to locations every 2 months and, at the request of some locations, they are no longer folded. This allows them to use the flyers as place mats if they so choose. This is great, as the goal all along was to get the list of events in front of the customers and people do read what is directly in front of them. Sam reports, "It is surprising how well this was received by our accounts. Our pool table giveaway was even more successful, primarily due to the fact that we learned a lot from our first giveaway. In one month, the number of participating locations grew from 41 to 55. Many locations that gave the extra effort in promoting the giveaway, found that they increased their daily traffic noticeably. Sam has been told that some have seen people they had never seen before or had not seen in a long time.

While Williams Enterprises does not expect to have any drawings in the near future, other locations have shown an interest in having their events listed on the flyers. Williams still charges the \$25 fee to put a location in the program even though it will not get the benefit of the traffic the drawing produced. This is justified because the location did not assist in the building of the database.

Successful League Marketing

Recruitment is the lifeblood of your dart leagues and your success in today's competitive leisure market. There are three steps needed to create an effective plan: visualize, organize and realize. But often we still fall back to putting up posters and putting on the same old tournaments as our only method to recruit new players.

Events are a great way to introduce people to the fun of playing in a dart league. But, we have to realize the truths about recruiting people.

Truths About Recruiting People for Your Leagues

1. People don't join an advertisement or a brochure. They join a group of people that they have fun with, and enjoy being with. PEOPLE JOIN PEOPLE.
2. Printed marketing materials only help to pique interest or inform. Success requires the human touch.
3. Studies have shown repeatedly that ACTIVE personal recruiting gets the results you need.
4. People may NOT show up to your event if merely invited, you must bring them to your recruitment event.
5. Once your recruit decides to join INVOLVE them immediately. Don't allow more than 3 days to pass before the next event.
6. People respond to emotional needs and desires. The sporting aspect of darting is only one piece of the picture.

7. Your newest recruits are your BEST recruiters. Establish an incentive/reward program for players doing the best recruiting.
8. Examine your target audience. Everyone has different reasons for joining a league. You must know what your recruits are looking for, and then deliver it!
9. People join because they want a recreational activity an organized participation structure friendship and camaraderie a social group they feel comfortable with.
10. People join because they want to have FUN!!

Recruitment doesn't end at sign up. New players are often put off or intimidated by the unwritten rules of league play -- who coins up after a win, house rounds, scoring, feats. Offer a helping hand to these new players to get them started off on the right foot.

In the height of millennium frenzy, talk of the X-generation and the echo boomers, a successful recruitment strategy has to address the changing demographic. Take two minutes to profile your average player.

Average player profile:

- What percentage are male? What percentage are female?
- How old are they?
- What is their work schedule?
- What is their occupation?
- What is their education?
- What are their family commitments?

Based on your average player profile, take a look to see:

- Have we limited ourselves?
- Who are we excluding?
- Can we appeal to a broader audience?
- What can we change about our leagues to attract a broader base?

Think out of the box. Remember, if you always do what you always did you'll always get what you always got!

- To include others look at retirees, shift workers, companies, and students.
- To attract more players consider changing the time of day leagues meet, looking at weekend vs. weekday play, involving the spouse or significant other, and involving the family.
- To include others and attract more players, look at locations other than bars or taverns.

This is not just about getting more players for your dart leagues; it's about having a successful coin-op business. These same principals will increase your darts leagues, your locations, and your business. That makes it worth doing.

Increasing Dart League Visibility and Involvement

In leading your business over the years, you have probably explored various methods of marketing and advertising, with varying results. In marketing your dart leagues successfully, it's important to remember to focus your message on a probable responsive audience. For example, it might be a waste of time and resources to purchase advertising in newspapers or other publications of a general audience, for this "shotgun" approach may not produce desired results. It may bring awareness of your league play opportunities to a large number of readers, but may not lead them to action. The desired action, of course, is for prospects to check out your leagues, contact you and join.

The cardinal rule of effective marketing is to know your target audience. Where do they go to socialize? What do they read or subscribe to? What other organizations do they belong to? When you begin to answer these basic marketing questions, you'll have a better feel how to market to these populations effectively. Not only will proper targeting save you money, it will likely yield faster results.

To begin, your potential players may already be regular or sporadic patrons of a location you serve with a league. Many operators have had success at placing an attractive banner in the location, which reads something like, "The ABC Dart League plays here Tuesdays, 7 p.m." Be sure to place your logo, the location log and a graphic of a dart machine on the

banner. There is also a subtle science to the color scheme and font patterns used; they should be bright, eye-catching and as large as practical. You'll also need to account for the traditionally low light level in most locations, and compensate by using light-colored lettering on a darker background. You'll likely find several companies online who specialize in custom vinyl banners; and oftentimes, "quick copy" places have this service available.

Using the concept of signage is also a good idea on or around your dart machines. Depending on the type and model you distribute, you can advertise your leagues on the video monitors. If these are not available in all your locations, a placard placed strategically near the coin slot or at eye level with the board will get attention. Some operators use the NDA's personalized adhesive foul line markers printed with league information on them. During play, every player looks down at it several times.

Table tents cards are widely used for advertising various events or specials in your locations. The concept behind these is very simple; your message is on both sides of a folded, free-standing paper tent that sits on tables and perhaps every few spaces at the bar. These can be done quite inexpensively using an array of popular desktop publishing programs like Microsoft Publisher®; and specialized paper stock for this use can be found at many office supply stores. With these, you can refresh them at your locations easily and often, at little expense of time or money.

Many tavern locations subscribe to the electronic trivia games using television monitors. These also present you with advertising possibilities with the patronage audience. In addition, many of the computerized table-top video games are now capable of advertising your dart league message. Don't overlook these possibilities as you formulate your targeted marketing strategy.

As stated earlier, general newspapers may not provide you with enough focus, and are likely too expensive in their advertising fees. Thus, smaller community-type publications are typically weekly or monthly in scope, distributed free in businesses, and your locations may be among those that have these available for their patrons. These usually have a entertainment section, which is a logical, targeted place for you to advertise your dart leagues. In addition to paid advertising in these publications, you can also provide to the publishers a news release, for example, of the winning team(s) in your league play system. Be sure to provide a photo of the winners, and it may appear as a news or human interest article, free of charge. In addition, if you sponsored teams at NDA's Team Dart held in Las Vegas, their participation or winning announcement should be placed to boost awareness of your leagues.

Regardless of the media you select to inform your target audience, there are some rules of effective marketing to keep in mind when preparing your message for print or electronic communication. First, the message must reflect your product; which in this case, is FUN. Be sure to use eye-catching color schemes and print fonts. Don't overload it with unnecessary information, but keep it basic. State when and where league play occurs, and show how easy it is to get involved. Stay away from giving a phone number to call for more information - most people won't do it. Rather, make sure your Web site has updated league involvement information posted on it, and give your URL address in your ads and news articles. And most importantly, make it clear that potential new players are welcomed and encouraged to check out and join your leagues.

If you have a new or mature league program, recruiting and retaining players takes a plan. That plan should encompass a variety of the ideas mentioned in this and previous articles. So, if your leagues are not performing to your expectations, go back and work the plan. You will see the results.