

**COLUMN: As The Saws Turn**

**TITLE: Shooting Fish in a Barrel**

Last night was the St. Louis Business Marketing Association's annual Targeted Advertising & Marketing (TAM) awards event. This event brings together the local advertising and marketing community to recognize some of the best work done in the last year. It includes categories that range from direct mail, print advertising, newsletters and annual reports to exhibit design, trade show promotions and event marketing.

For this particular event, over 45 local companies submitted over 210 individual projects that were judged by advertising and marketing executives from outside the city. Last night's awards presentation event drew over 300 advertising and marketing folks from client companies and agencies. It has grown to be the largest and most prestigious program in the city.

In my mind, our association with this group and with this event in particular has had more impact on the growth of our company at a very economical cost than anything else we do to market our company. Because we have chosen to sponsor this event, we have received exposure through e-mail marketing, direct marketing, telemarketing and print advertising, all aimed directly at our target audience. We have received recognition from the event itself through the staff we have provided to plan and produce the event and the awards we have won in the competitions.

It all sounds great...and it is. Here's the part I don't understand, though: We have tried over the last couple years to convince more companies in our part of the world (the other exhibit designers and event planners) to participate, and for the most part, they have declined to be a part of it. To be sure, there is some

cost associated with participation – entry fees and the time commitment – but the benefits seem to far outweigh the cost.

Just one example: I have been trying to make contact with a prospective client for several months, through e-mail and voicemail, with no luck. Turns out, she is at the event last night, and her company won several awards. My two-minute personal introduction and congratulations last night brought an invitation to a follow up meeting. Most of our sales force was at this event last night, doing the exact same thing – connecting with clients and prospective clients. As one of my guys put it: “It’s like shooting fish in a barrel”.

Which brings me to my point: We view these events in two ways. The first is to support our local industry associations and the business to business community that we work in. And the second, by virtue of the first, is to meet new prospective clients. It’s a great opportunity to be a part of our business community and at the same time meet new people in the industry. I just can’t figure out why some of our competitors aren’t in it as well.

I suppose I should be happy that we are the only ones involved from the trade show side. I mean, we can talk to all these prospective clients without a competitor in the place. And we always walk away with awards and recognition. But from a trade show industry standpoint, we are not well represented. On the ad agency side, there is much more competition, and much more camaraderie. I guess that’s what’s missing: It would be nice to have a few more trade show and event people hanging around. Besides, it’s a lot more fun to win an award when there are more competitors in the running.

See you on the show floor.

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