

THE BUSINESS OF MARKETING SQUARE DANCING

Parts I & 11

Seminar Presentation at Festival 2004, Calgary on Friday July 30, 2004

“Make it relevant and they will come!” --Eddie Powell

“Persistence is Omnipotent” --Calvin Coolidge

About The Presenter – Brian Elmer, Westbank, BC

Brian Elmer currently chairs SQUAREUPB.C., a marketing initiative of the B.C. Square & Round Dance Federation. He holds a Diploma of Technology in Broadcast Communications (Television) from the B.C. Institute of Technology and a Certificate in Fundraising Management from Okanagan University College.

Most notably, Brian has been continuously employed at one commercial television station since 1970. That operation is CHBC Television, serving B.C.'s Okanagan Valley from Kelowna, owned by Canwest Global Communications but affiliated with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. He has served in many areas of that operation, particularly as Director of TV News Presentation for seven years, Promotions Producer for three years and Promotion Director for five years. He currently serves as a Master Control Operator, in charge of transmitting the programs and commercials and also switches video and audio for news programs. In addition, Brian serves the station in a public relations role by conducting tours of the broadcast facility.

Brian's leadership roles in the square and round dance activity have involved participation at local, regional, provincial and national levels, mostly in a public relations and promotion capacity. He served as Promotion Director for the first provincial Festival to take place inland, Festival 189, which attracted 900 participants to the city of Kelowna.

His extensive experience in marketing the square dance recreation has found him in demand at Festival and Convention education sessions, including a CALLERLAB convention, in Vancouver, B.C.

The national certificate course that Brian took in fundraising management taught a business approach to organizational development and fundraising within non-profit sector agencies. He has presented seminars on the subject to the membership of the B.C. and was a keynote speaker at a Leadership Seminar.

Square dancing has been a part of Brian's life for 38 years, including 5 years as a teen dancer, part of which was spent with the Wesburn Wranglers youth club when he competed at the Annual Pacific Northwest Teen Square Dance Festival. He has been a member of the Westsyde Squares adult club of Kelowna, B.C., since 1971. He met his wife, Rosalyn Garnett on the square dance floor in Penticton, B.C. Brian and Rosalyn recently helped form and operate a new youth square dance club in B.C.'s Central Okanagan Valley, including the communities of Kelowna and Westbank. Brian also co-ordinates in-class square dance instruction of elementary school students utilizing the volunteer help of a local caller-teacher.

In the years 1998 and 1999, as a member of the Public Relations and Promotion Committee of the Canadian Square and Round Dance Society, Brian spearheaded the production of a youth square dance recruitment video called “Cool Moves.” He continues to fill orders for the video, sending tapes to destinations in Canada, the United States and Europe. He also continues to represent B.C. with his wife on the national P.R./Promotion Committee.

Brian says that his dedicated volunteer service to our activity has been motivated by his belief that our social recreation has great value to offer modern society. He's been impressed by the many kind and decent people he has met across the square.

“The Business of Marketing Square Dancing”
Festival 2004, Calgary, Friday July 30, 2004

OPENING ADDRESS

Good afternoon and thank you for coming. It's an honour to be part of the education program at Festival 2004, Calgary. I hope that you're having a good time at the convention.

My name is Brian Elmer and my wife and I are square and round dancers and we've had many hours of enjoyment from the recreation and want it to be around for many years to come.

As your presenter, I bring to you 34 years of experience with a commercial television station in British Columbia's interior. I hold a Diploma of Technology in Broadcast Communications and a Certificate in Fundraising Management. I've been square and round dancing for 38 years and 5 of those years were as a teen. I've volunteered 31 years in leadership roles, mostly concentrating on the promotion of our activity. For the last 14 years I've headed up a marketing initiative of the B.C. Square and Round Dance Federation that we call SQUAREUPB.C.

During my career I worked for several years as a Promotion Director in commercial television, advertising the station's TV shows and maintaining good public relations with the community. My current television work is in the area of TV production and on-air presentation. It has been in a volunteer capacity, marketing our square and round dance recreation, that I have really gained considerable experience.

This seminar, being presented in two parts over the next two hours, has been called: “The Business of Marketing Square Dancing.” Whether you realize it or not, our square dance recreation operates in most cases as a non-profit business. Such a business is task-oriented instead of profit-oriented. Volunteers in positions of leadership at the club, regional association and provincial federation levels are the business managers of the activity. I've chosen to wear business attire today to make that point and to honour all of you who are striving to make the business of square dancing live long and prosper. I'd like us to maintain a business mindset during today's proceedings.

It's important to take a moment to clarify the term “non-profit.” In Canada, our Customs and Revenue Agency defines it as “a club, society or association that operates for any purpose other than profit.” In actuality, a non-profit organization can amass a considerable amount of money in order to undertake the tasks before it. It is often found that dancers and leaders within our square dance recreation are of the mistaken belief that our groups can't make a profit. The non-profit term simply means that none of the organization's leadership can be paid for their time and effort. Full reimbursement can be made for out-of-pocket expenses incurred while doing the business of the organization.

Part I of this seminar was advertised as including:

- The “Four P's” of a marketing strategy
- Competitive Positioning
- Research
- Market Segmentation
- Media Synergy

In the second hour, Part II will complement Part I by examining some square dance marketing strategies that have been used. We'll look at promotional tools such as a media kit, TV commercial, various display items and handouts for new dancer prospects.

There is handout information available for you that covers each session but I want to hold distribution until the end of each hour so it won't become a distraction during the presentations.

Please hold your questions until the last part of the hour unless the question is to correct me on an error or to seek clarification.

PART I Marketing Basics

Presenter: Brian Elmer, Dipl. Tech. (Broadcast Communications), Cert. (Fundraising Management)

This particular session is intended to give you some basics in marketing. It will contain some show-and-tell elements and there will be some video components.

The topics we'll explore are:

1. The Definition of Marketing
2. The 3 Organizational “Ps” in Advance of Marketing
3. The 4 “Ps” of a Marketing Strategy
4. Competitive Positioning
5. Research as a Marketing Tool
6. Market Segmentation and “Relevance”
7. Media Synergism
8. The Value of Persistence
9. Questions from the Floor

What is the Definition of Marketing?

What it's often mistakenly thought to be is selling and promotion. Although those elements are in the larger marketing mix, in short, marketing is simply an exchange process. Somebody has something to offer that another acquires by offering something in return-a partnership. A more specific definition is that marketing is a human activity directed at satisfying needs and wants through exchange processes.

Here's a breakdown of the words in that definition and some others, examining needs, wants, demands, products, exchange, transactions and markets.

Needs - Human need is a state of felt deprivation in a person. The most basic concept underlying marketing is that of human needs. Humans have complex needs which are a part of their basic makeup; both physical and physiological.

Wants - Human wants are the form human needs take as shaped by culture and individual personality. Needs and wants are often confused. Wants are objects that satisfy needs.

Demands -Wants can become demands when backed by buying power. We have unlimited wants but limited money. Human needs, wants and demands are satisfied by products or, in the case of the square dance recreation, services.

Products -A product is anything that can be offered to a market for attention, acquisition, use or consumption that might satisfy a want or need. In addition to goods and services, this includes persons, organizations, activities and ideas. To the consumer they are all products or “satisfiers.”

Exchange - The act of obtaining a desired object from someone by offering something in return is called an exchange.

Transaction - A transaction consists of a trade of values between two parties.

Marketing - Marketing consists of actions taken to obtain a desired response from a target audience to some product, service, idea or other object. A market is the set of actual and potential buyers of a product.

When it comes to marketing the square dance recreation, our activity can satisfy the human need for exercise and socialization, among other things. If we can get a person to want modern square dancing to satisfy their needs, we'll be happy to exchange our services in return for their participation.

The 3 Organizational “P’s” in Advance of Marketing

Before setting a marketing strategy, 3 “P” words have to be considered:

Purpose - Is there agreement as to the purpose of the organization and the purpose of marketing?

Politics - Every organization has to have its internal politics in order. Is everything stable? Is the leadership competent and caring? Will any external politics affect a plan, such as governmental restrictions?

Personnel - All personnel in the organization should be involved in a new strategy because they can provide input. After all, they have to live with the results.

The 4 “P’s” of a Marketing Strategy

A marketing strategy is best represented by four “P” words and each word must be researched and analyzed to create a successful marketing plan. The basics of marketing are: Product, Place, Price and Promotion.

As relates to the square dance world, product could be considered “service,” and the word “time” could be added to place. The square dance recreation is a service that’s available at a particular place at a particular time and that’s what is promoted.

Promotion cannot take place until the first three “Ps” have been determined. Again, each element must be researched and analyzed before putting the strategy into action. Sometimes it’s the Promotion that takes the blame for lack of results when the real problem was a badly planned product, place and price.

A marketing strategy cannot be set in stone. It’s an on-going process that requires, planning, evaluation and further planning.

The enemies of a marketing strategy, the 3 “Ps” to be avoided, are: Perfection, Procrastination and Paralysis.

Every good marketing strategy should generate a bottom line “P”: Pride!

At this time we’re going to have some fun analyzing the marketing strategy of a real-world produce store by starting with a look at their TV promotion and then working backwards to determine their strategy relative to price, place and product.

(Exercise) - 30 second television commercial viewing and analysis of “Paul’s Produce”, closing with what the store had to say about the success of their marketing strategy.

(Exercise) Having examined the marketing strategy of a business, what now can we identify within the square dance world as the product, place and price offering? What are some of the positives and negatives of those offerings that make it easy or hard to promote?

Now that we understand the place of Promotion in the entire marketing mix (the 4 “P’s”), let’s examine a national company in Canada that prefers to use radio for their promotion. Sleep Country Mattresses is a national chain store and its head, Christine McGee, is a personality known to most of the country. The store likes the medium of radio to promote for three reasons: Repetitive, Flexible and Intrusive. (examination of those words). Radio also uses imagination, having the ability through spoken word, music and sound effects to transport the listener anywhere.

Sleep Country has also launched a television campaign right now in Canada. One of the ads is a wonderful blend of live action and animation. Store rep. Christine McGee is seen on camera trying to tell about the quality of the mattresses for sale but gets interrupted when the lights go out. The ad cuts to animated sheep, the same ones that you would count if you couldn’t get to sleep, who are turning off the power to stop Christine from selling mattresses that deliver a good night’s sleep.

The company believes in market “branding,” meaning they want you to think of Sleep Country first when it comes to a good night’s sleep. Such branding encourages what is called “top of mind recall.”

(Exercise) Lots experiment with what’s at the top of your mind! Call out your response to these items: Gas station? Gas station slogan? (Chevron: “Your Town Pump”) Grocery store? Soda pop? Mattresses? Realtor? Auto-maker? Fast Food Restaurant? (old: McDonalds: “you deserve a break today,” - their now one is “I’m Lovin’ It”, other new ones: DQ: “Something Different” Wendys: “It’s Better Here”) Leisure-time activity?

Competitive Positioning

Keeping your product or service “out front,” ahead of others of its kind, is called Competitive Positioning. It involves three positioning factors:

1. perception of our physical attributes-what’s your image?
2. contrast between services-how does your service compare with the competitors?
3. quality of service-how do you rate for efficiency and courtesy? How wonderful it would be if, in the category of leisure time activity, the modern square dance recreation could hold a competitive position that was right up there with golf or bowling. The competitive positioning of square dancing needs a lot more attention. It is something that regional, provincial and national dance leadership organizations can do best through the media. Our clubs would find their recruitment campaigns more successful if the public was made more aware of our recreation through an active competitive positioning strategy.

It is notable that in the United States, in the State of Maine, they've formed a registered charity known as the Committee for the Promotion of Square and Round Dancing, Incorporated. The Committee promotes square and round dancing by using TV, radio and the print media as finances provide. They obviously understand competitive positioning because they say that, although some who've been reached by the media campaign may respond to the ads, this tool is intended to change a perception with a modern day appearance and to assist the dancer's efforts to recruit new dancers, not to replace the one-to-one personal contact. They explain that time is the key element for effectiveness, not instant gratification-for what has taken many moons to come down will take a few sunrises to commence its way back up.

Research as a Marketing Tool

We've learned that research and analysis must be conducted on your marketing strategy. Let's look at some research available to us in establishing a strategy for square dancing.

The September 1999 issue of American Square Dance Magazine contained an article by John Brant entitled Square Dance Market Research. It identified that Australian and American attitudes about square dancing may be similar.

It reads: "A public relations and research company in Sydney, Australia, conducted a survey of Australians in New South Wales. The purpose was to find out what the current perspective of the general public is of square dancing and how to improve it. The results of that survey may be relevant to the attitudes of Americans (& Canadians).

(excerpts read from the article)

In the United States, CALLERLAB'S "Foundation for the Preservation and Promotion of Square Dancing" has launched the multi-phase "Phoenix Plan" that seeks to revitalize interest in our recreation. Phase I has produced some valuable research.

The initial study that polled almost 2000 persons on the internet found that, nationally, direct contact with square dancing is minimal. At least 8 out of 10 people have not participated in the activity as adults. The image of the activity was moderately positive and most people were neutral. Those who tried the activity had positive opinions of it and that participation bred goodwill.

A series of focus group surveys was also conducted in three U.S. cities, speaking both to non-dancers and former dancers. The non-dancer group findings were that Baby Boomers are reluctant to get involved with any activity that requires a long-term commitment. They are pressed for time, stressed with work, and heavily preoccupied with free time activities. Secondly, they stated that square dancing appears to be a relatively monolithic program, requiring conformity and making high demands with respect to time, commitment, clothing and general format. Lastly, the Boomer generation holds a negative image of the activity based on out-of-date concepts not reflecting today's dance experience. They are unfamiliar with Modern Square Dancing.

The findings in the focus group surveys of former dancer groups resulted in six points:

1. Modern Square Dancing has a very low profile. People who might be enticed into the activity have no idea how to get involved.
2. Those who participated in square dancing and subsequently left had a very positive image of the activity. These people would return to the recreation but not without changes in the circumstances that led to their departure.
3. Dance club culture can be friendly and welcoming to some but, to others, it can also be inflexible, cliquish and exclusive.
4. Dance clubs appear to be unable to work with single members. (This is of concern because the emerging Boomer group is composed of a near 60 per cent single factor.)
5. Dance programs at different levels of expertise are unavailable and a key reason that some dropped out of the activity. Seemingly critical to retention is the ability of new dancers to have the option to remain at the Mainstream program, just having fun at the level they learned during the first class cycle.
6. Current club organizational structure is not oriented to marketing the square dance activity. There is a need for collaboration on important advertising and public relations programs, as well as issues of scheduling and program changes.

The Public Relations and Promotion Committee of the Canadian Square & Round Dance Society conducted its own survey of non-dancers in recent years. Those results can assist in the design of a marketing strategy. It revealed that only 38 per cent of Canadians have ever tried square or round dancing. That shows a lot of room to continue appealing for new dancers because most Canadians haven't tried it. A surprising result of the survey was that 84 per cent of Canadians said they like country music. That shows us our music isn't a drawback and that perhaps we should promote our music as a selling point. Another surprise of the survey was that 59 per cent of Canadians like square dance attire, making it not a major problem as was once thought.

Market Segmentation and Relevance

Marketing can be done to the masses or it can be directed at a niche group, thereby segmenting the market. The most effective form of marketing is by market segmentation. That is accomplished through two tasks:

1. Defining the Market - identifying and selecting the population segments which meet the priorities of the organization
2. Targeting the Market - directing marketing activities toward those defined market segments deemed to have the highest potential

Defining the market involves a look at many variables but this must be done before the targeting can occur. The variables include consideration of:

- Geographic and Demographic segments (age, gender, income)
- Psychographic Segments (social class, personalities, ideas, interests & lifestyles)
- Behavioural Segments (knowledge, use, response to a service)
- Attitude (feeling, mindset) (AARP reports their senior membership sees themselves as 20 years younger than they are)

The most accessible source of market segment information is your government's statistics branch. In Canada, it is "Stats Canada" and you can find their reports at the library or you can contact their office for assistance. The type of information available includes details for any given region on age, gender, income levels, faith and ethnic backgrounds.

(Exercise) The CBC television network produced an investigative program broadcast weekly called "Undercurrents." A show from January of 2000 explored "data mining." The following segment from that program demonstrates to what high degree market segmentation has evolved. (Video shows targeting through grocery store "valued shopper" cards.)

It was most opportune that something came in the mail to my wife a few years ago that demonstrates some market segmentation that really "hit home" for us! Rosalyn has an interest in gardening and that includes flower gardening, especially with regard to irises. She retained her last name of "Garnett" when we married, so this full colour booklet of flower bulbs for sale arrived with her name and town peppered throughout the publication. It's absolutely "personalized." (Exhibit) It is quite possible that the advertising agency for this flower bulb company bought her name along with others on a mailing list for a gardening magazine that she once subscribed to. That guaranteed them that this person is interested in gardening. That's effective market segmentation.

Mr. Eddie Powell, a square dancer and marketing professional in the United States, has published an article about how "relevance" should be the key word in marketing square dancing. He points out that the recreation has many things to offer to many different people. He suggests that we should market specific qualities about the recreation directly to the people who most seek those qualities. It's market segmentation. For instance, specialty television channels now target persons who, at this moment in their lives, are solely interested in golf, or food, or travel, or home improvements, etc. Eddie says that square dancing should market a relevant message to individuals such as square dancing's aerobic benefits to sports viewers and square dancing's travel opportunities to the travel viewer. He concludes: "Make it relevant and they will come!"

Media Synergism

There is a principle in marketing called synergy, defined as a combined or co-ordinated action, where the resulting outcome can be greater than the sum of the parts. It's a working together of promotional approaches for greater impact. Media synergism engages two or more media outlets, such as television, newspaper and direct mail. One medium references and supports the other. In the video about to be seen, the use of television is strongly advocated but just the same, we have a valuable look at the concept of synergism. It also demonstrates the advantages and limitations of various media.

(Exercise: Segment of a video called "Media Synergism")

The promotion of square dancing can take advantage of the power of synergy. A campaign a few years ago in the British Columbia interior did just that. Commercial television, radio, newspaper and the direct mailing of brochures were used in a competitive positioning and recruitment campaign. The brochure chosen set the theme: CALLERLAB'S Now Song & Dance Routine publication (exhibit). When dancers appeared before the public during the campaign, signage was displayed using the same theme and referring to the TV commercial (exhibit). The radio commercials used the audio from testimonials given in the TV ad and the announcer's copy opened with: "You've seen them on TV! People everywhere are discovering a new song & dance routine!"

The Value of Persistence

A man named Calvin Coolidge claimed that "persistence is omnipotent (all powerful)." He pointed out that, in many cases, it's by persistence alone that great things are (finally) accomplished in the world. It is probable that persistence, too, is the way to rebuild the square dancer population. A good marketing strategy that is persistent will deliver favourable results.

Questions from the Floor

Closing Comments

In closing this marketing portion today, I wish to quote James Hensley from his article in the October 1999 American Square Dance Magazine. His words say what I want to say:

"We need to change our perceptions about square dancing and its future. We no longer have the luxury of treating this wonderful activity as inherently immortal, something that will always be there for our occasional use and enjoyment and that only asks for our random participation.

In today's sophisticated battle for the consumer's loyalty regarding his leisure spending and time commitments, there is no more automatic immortality. There are only well managed and financially sponsored social activities that are kept healthy year after year by good planning, professional assistance, strong sponsorship and the commitment of a highly interactive group of dedicated participants." James says that until such support is in place, we simply can't take the recreation for granted at this time.

Thank you everyone so much for your attention and for fitting this presentation into your valuable time here at the national convention.

Supplement to Marketing Seminar

Regarding the first “P,” product (or service): Its most commonly promoted as: fun, fitness & friendship. In addition to those features, our promotion should exude enthusiasm, it should also have a strong presence by getting out in the public eye more often and we should make an effort to profile some of our more prominent members so as to convince others to join in by example. Such persons influence newcomers to participate by way of those newcomers wanting to affiliate and associate with such prominent members. Also, we need to promote what we do beyond the obvious qualities by telling of the “extras.” How about the camping, the travelling, the dining, socializing at non-square dance parties, visiting dance friends off the dance floor. And what about the opportunity to serve in a “power role through a leadership position in the recreation? That will appeal to some. Perhaps, too, we don't expand on what we mean by friendship as an offering of the activity. It often means a true and lasting lifelong friendship. It's not unusual at the funeral of a square dancer to find that the chapel is filled mostly with his or her square dance friends, there to honour their friend right up until death.

Also, we must remember some of the counter-elements that may deter new participants: Our activity is not “top of mind” as a leisure time recreation and is even an unknown for some of the general public. It is difficult to attract younger adults when, in marketing terms, we have no “critical mass” in that age range. Our dancer population is largely 60+. This is probably why word of mouth promotion has become less effective-because the source for accessing younger adults has dried up.

From ASD magazine article by James Hensley, Oct./99: Men don't generally take to dancing. Perceptions of our recreation, such as 30% of U.S. who think clogging is square dancing. Instruction isn't easy for all

PART 11

Marketing Strategies and Materials

Earlier, in Part I of this seminar, it was learned that a marketing approach requires consideration of the “Four P’s.” This requires that you direct your attention at the first three components, “product, place and price,” before launching into the fourth component which is “promotion.”

Furthermore, the need to competitively position our square dance recreation relative to other leisure-time pursuits was stressed. Also, some research into who's most likely to be interested as a new dancer prospect, what they're looking for and the demographic details involved can help identify the market segment or segments that are best targeted.

When the promotion component is launched, some media synergy using a combined and co-ordinated appeal, can bring about results that are greater than the sum of its parts.

Now in Part 11, some specific strategies and materials will be examined that reflect the approaches identified in Part 1.

ACTUAL STRATEGIES IN MARKETING MODERN SQUARE AND ROUND DANCING

National Initiatives:

Canadian Society’s extensive web site (www.squaredance.ca) & toll-free line (1-866-206-6696)

The Canadian Society’s P.R./Promo Committee. Current projects include:

Print & web advertising in 50+ Magazine

Nationwide cable TV campaign broadcasting a p.s.a. on specialty channels

-uses CALLERLAB'S brochure slogan: “A New Song & Dance Routine”

Provincial Initiatives:

The British Columbia Model:

The Establishment of SQUAREUPB.C. - A Marketing Initiative

-A renewed provincial committee

A marketing kit, a slogan, a banner, a badge

Communication: Toll-free INFOLINE (B.C. only), Web Site (utilizing regional webmasters), PROMOLINK (keeping promo rep.'s in touch)

Provincial Campaigns:

Football game half-time spectacular featuring 300 B.C. square dancers

JR Country radio, banner seen by spectators and pay TV audience,

Info Kit supplied to media, resulting newspaper article

Commercial TV advertising, follow-up surveys showed its influence

Commercial TV p.r.

Cable TV p.s.a. insertions in B.C.

Media attention for Festivals:

Pacific Northwest Teen Square Dance Festival, esp. Global TV feature

Provincial Festivals

Examples from Festival'99, Salmon Arm-

Media Kits

Special newspaper insert and tour guide feature

Radio Campaign, partnered funding, including pre and post ads

Festival Web Tour

Webcasting, including promotion of sponsor

Plan for B.C.'s Festival 2005 in Abbotsford using radio, media kits

Regional Campaign Assistance, boosting community awareness of large events

The British Columbia Model: ... continued

In-class school square dance instruction-pilot project, incl. "Cool Moves" video

Moving and Grooving - a new school instruction kit

Co-operation with National Society:

Ad Agency consultation

Cool Moves youth promotional video

Cable TV p.s.a. insertions-spot was produced in B.C.

B.C. Federation Internal Support:

Crests recognizing operational landmarks

Financial grants for new club startups and leadership

Increased dues to provide resources for programs, projects and marketing

A B.C. Dance Association's Marketing Plan for this Fall:

The Promotion Committee of the Fraser Valley Square and Round Dance Association is launching a *transit advertising campaign*. Their research has shown how they can segment the market by targeting particular demographic groups with certain income levels who ride the buses.

Other Provincial strategies:

Change Or Loose? It's your choice.

“A competitive world has two possibilities for you.
You can lose.
Or, if you want to win, you can change.”
--Lester C. Thurow***

I think that we who are trying to manage the square dance recreation are at a crossroad in the direction of our beloved square and round dance recreation. Leadership style and leadership expectations have been very much “status quo” for a long time, apparently everywhere. In an isolationist manner, we've been operating our clubs and regional associations in largely a caretaker role. Rather than be proactive, we've been reactive, doing little to address the growth and development of our organizations and develop long-term strategies and goals. This is isolationist in the sense that it is not the model of a progressive non-profit sector organization. We need to learn solid non-profit management techniques and, surely, that will mean change if we want to see results.

Yes, some of the trends within our recreation are discouraging. The closure of clubs and the amalgamation of others is not a sign of growth. But, there's too much to lose by quitting. Determination and perseverance are required. Together, we can press on and encouraging signs will surface.

Why make an effort to perpetuate our recreation? Because modern day society needs it. Our activity presents people with a dance form that's about teamwork, co-operation and tolerance in a highly social atmosphere with the added features of fitness, fun and laughter. And don't forget the simple pleasure of moving to music--it's a celebration of life! On the square dance floor there is no concern over rank, religion, politics or social status. Modern day society needs this treasure called modern square dancing.

One of the key objectives in a regional dance association should be for its member clubs to work together on recruitment. We need both new dancers and new callers. New callers generally come from the ranks of new dancers. Not everyone wants to take up our recreation. That's “a given” but some will be interested. The secret is in appealing to adequate numbers of persons from which to extract those who will be interested. Adequate numbers of appeals means to hundreds or thousands--it's a “numbers game.”

Influencing persons to join our recreation through word-of-mouth contact is powerful because it's personal. A problem we face with word of mouth as the sole “sales tool” is that the source of non-dancers with whom to engage in dialogue has dried up. Our dance community members tend to associate mostly with other dancers. The opportunity to dialogue with a substantial number of non-dancers is limited. Word of mouth has to be supported with advertising.

Another of our objectives has to be to bring our recreation out of obscurity. To do that, a non-profit group has to develop a competitive positioning strategy--a plan to flow from its competitors. It's been said that square dancing is one of the world's best kept secrets. Furthermore, we have to realize that we are in a competitive race to capture people's leisure time. A wrench has been thrown into the works and its name is competition. The concept that interest in square dancing goes in cycles is now out the window because of a more highly competitive atmosphere. The personal computer, the Internet, and digital cable television offering hundreds of highly specialized channels are just a few distractions consuming people's leisure time today, different from a decade ago.

Increased levels of recreational program offerings, as witnessed by the recreation centre guides that come to your door, identify other competition facing us. To think that square dancing is simply in the downturn of a cycle and will eventually take an upswing is wishful thinking... and a “do nothing” attitude.

We should be rather optimistic about recruitment at this point in time. The reason is the huge baby boomer population that is a perfect group at which to make an appeal. Let's show these empty-nesters or retirees how our recreation will enhance their lives.

We must persist in advancing our recreation and we must do it as a team, arm-in-arm, club with club and the regional dance associations are the common sense organizations in which to do it. At a recent association meeting I heard the Vice-President say that “it's not so much about what we're doing as about what we're not doing.”

Not to be forgotten are the provincial and national leadership organizations. Your Federation and the Canadian Society have materials and expertise to offer.

You are needed to create an effective team to advance our recreation into the 21st Century and beyond. Let's join hands, club to club, make any necessary changes and be persistent in showing modern square dancing as relevant and of great value in today's society. Our cherished recreation deserves nothing less.

“Permanence, perseverance
and persistence in spite of all
obstacles, discouragements,
and impossibilities:
It is this, that distinguishes
the strong soul from the weak.”
--Thomas Carlyle

“Success is connected with action.
Successful people keep moving.
They make mistakes
but they don't quit.
That's why
I'll never quit.”
--Conrad Hilton

* Brian Elmer has square and round danced for 38 years, 5 as a teen. He has worked in commercial television for 34 years, holding a Diploma of Technology in Broadcast Communications (Television). In 1995, he was awarded a Certificate in Fundraising Management from Okanagan University College at Kelowna.

**Lester Thurow is a professor of economics and management at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and has been the Dean of the Sloan School of Business at MIT. He has three New York Times best selling books to his credit and consults worldwide.