

## **MARKETING PLAN IMPROVEMENTS for the EMERALD COAST CHORUS (ECC)**

### **Executive Summary**

Pursuant to a letter from the Emerald Coast Chorus asking for recommendations from the ISP of Okaloosa-Walton College to improve and expand on their marketing efforts and perhaps increase their membership, a committee of the ISP was formed to look into this problem. Over the course of several months, a committee of the ISP met with members of the ECC to examine their current activities with appropriate comparison to other organizations of their kind in the Emerald Coast area. Our findings may be found in the paragraphs below.

Recommendations of the ISP committee for the ECC are summarized in the following four points. These points are further expanded under the **Recommendations** section of the marketing plan below.

1. Expand the number of ECC performances to develop a following that anticipates your next performance.
2. Advertise the ECC performance season through other performing arts organizations.
3. Work on more public exposure.
4. Mount a systematic pursuit of grants.

### **Description of the Approved ISP Project**

The Emerald Coast Chorus (ECC), a member of the International Barbershop Harmony Society, requested that ISP evaluate their current marketing efforts and make recommendations for improvement. The ECC is a 501(C) (3) organization as is the entire Barbershop Harmony Society. The chorus and quartets have been performing in the greater Ft. Walton Beach area since the late 1970's and are not satisfied with the results of their current efforts to recruit quality singers, sell tickets to major performances, and obtain sponsorship. They are also seeking ideas on how to become better recognized as a musical arts organization in this area.

## **Background of the Problem**

The Barbershop Harmony Society has been in existence since 1938 and is an international organization dedicated to promoting, preserving, and entertaining in the barbershop harmony art form of singing (one of only five or six truly American musical art forms).

The ECC has been in existence in the greater Ft. Walton Beach area since 1979. In their early years (when live entertainment in this area was sparse), they seemed to have had a fairly good following and could count on filling the OWC field house for their annual show. The recent decade has seen more live entertainment being offered along the Emerald Coast area, and the chorus finds it more difficult to promote their shows and events. ECC has an annual show every spring (Ft. Walton Civic Auditorium for many years and Mattie Kelly Arts Center main stage since 2005.) They have been very active having quartets deliver singing Valentines for hire, invited to perform ~10 times per year (some paid, some gratis), and visiting nursing homes and hospitals to try to spread some cheer to those less fortunate.

They have made modest gains on their problems over the past 5 years, but are looking for some fresh approaches that may have a better return on investment of efforts and resources. They came to ISP requesting outside recommendations on how to better market their chorus

- to good male singers to grow their membership faster,
- to the public that patronizes live performances so they can sell more tickets to their shows and other regular events,
- to corporations for sponsorship.

To illustrate their challenges:

On March 3rd, 2007 the ECC had their annual show at the Mattie Kelly Arts Center with participation from three area high schools performance chorus' (Voices of Valhalla, Chamber Choir, and Chanticleer) and the reigning international quartet champions of the Barbershop Harmony Society (a real coup since they were in such great demand). In spite of the chapter's efforts to promote the show over a two month period of time through the newspapers, radio, flyers, participating high schools, and mailings; the main floor of the Arts Center was only two-thirds full (~700). Chorus members personally sold about half of all tickets.

A guest night in late March 2007 was promoted through newspapers, radio, mailing of over 2,500 post cards/letters, and personal invitations by members –11 guests attended. Of that number, only 4 have joined the

chorus. It should be noted that joining a barbershop chapter is a significant commitment to participate in weekly rehearsals and scheduled performances. Some barbershop aficionados are not willing to make that kind of a commitment.

A campaign to obtain financial sponsors was initiated by ECC in 2006. Face-to-face meetings were held with 6 businesses (banks, Cox Communications, NW FL Daily News, and engineering firms) and only one made a modest contribution.

## **Project Approach**

The ISP project team consisted of David Bechtold (Chairman), Sam MacNulty, and Darrell James (a long time member of the ECC and new ISP member). We conducted several meetings: 1) March 23<sup>rd</sup> with Jim Brown (President of ECC) and Lee Leon (member of ECC and retired professor from OWC) to further discuss problem areas and understand what approaches have already been tried, 2) April 20<sup>th</sup> - project team meeting to brainstorm and debate new ideas, and 3) further project team meetings to revise the draft report and add some implementation suggestions.

## **Findings**

We compliment the ECC on being a good representative of the Barbershop Harmony Society and for providing high quality four-part male harmony entertainment to our local community. We were pleasantly surprised to learn that the chapter is already investing substantial marketing resources and effort. Our recommendations for improvement should be considered as additions rather than replacements for what is currently working.

To try to understand why ECC is not making larger gains in the areas of interest, we contrasted operations with other live entertainment organizations in the area (Community Chorus, ECCA, Stage Crafters, etc.) which seem to enjoy greater recognition and following. Information about the other organizations was based on personal knowledge by members of the ISP study team. Not every “Live Entertainment Organization” exploits every factor in this list, but the taken together; these appear to be the major opportunities.

These comparisons and contrasting operations are spelled out in the tables on the next page:

Factors	Emerald Coast Chorus	Some Live Entertainment Organizations
Shows per season	1	3-5
Promote & sell season package		✓
Advertise through each other's show programs		✓
Member of Okaloosa Arts Alliance	✓	✓
Member of Chamber of Commerce		✓
Routinely showcase their organization in newspapers		✓
Discount show tickets for students		✓
Give performances at high schools		✓
Participate in TV telethons		✓
Advertise with road-side signs		✓
Annually submit financial grant proposals		✓
Have a web site	✓	✓
Advertise to recruit singers	✓	✓

Observations from the table are that ECC is a “single show” per year organization and currently does not promote a performance “season”. Their mini-show at Camp Timpooshee every September is not counted because of the limited seating and venue which would not broadly attract area show-goers. ECC advertises their events (show, Valentines, Timpooshee) one at a time year-over-year.

Some of the factors other music arts organizations use may be very beneficial to ECC. They should continue to be evaluated for their potential cost/benefit and further prioritized for implementation.

It is worth noting that the greater Ft. Walton Beach area enjoys a large amount of live entertainment throughout the year, and groups are in competition with each other for audiences, performers and funds. It is critical for an organization like ECC to “keep up” with the marketing efforts of others and try to avoid periods when the other entertainment

groups are extremely active.

## **Recommendations**

Based upon our analysis of the situation, we grouped our recommendations in (4) areas for improvement:

- 1) Expand the number of ECC performances to develop a following that anticipates your next performance**
  - Continue your major spring show at Mattie Kelly Arts Center each year
  - Create a second major show (two shows per year)
    - Move the Timpoochee show to a convenient church venue and promote it better - ie: Niceville Methodist Church
    - Or create another show in addition to what you do at Timpoochee
  - Consider also performing on some other local organization's shows, i.e. Community Chorus, to get broader exposure
  - Market your show season at every opportunity. Sell tickets for both shows as a season.
  - Make sure you are not competing with other area show dates
  - Sell tickets through ticket outlets (area retailers) like other groups.
  
- 2) Advertise the ECC performance season through other performing arts organizations**
  - Ads in their show programs reach audiences that patronize and support live arts entertainment in this area
  - Create ads that promote the ECC show season and give contacts for Valentines & new singers
  - Purchase ads
    - Emerald Coast Concert Association (ECCA) – for sure
    - Explore First Arts and other OAA musical members
  - Spend the energy to get to know the “movers and shakers” of the performing arts groups in this area on a personal basis. Solicit their assistance in your endeavors.

### **3) Work on more public exposure – in addition to singing**

- Periodic newspapers write ups describing what the chorus is all about and using eye-catching headlines, i.e.: “Emerald Coast Chorus Keeps America Singing”, etc.
- Participate more on local TV, i.e.: telethons.
- Continue participation in Prime Time at OWC by leading a class in barbershop harmony music appreciation as you are already doing in the fall 2007
- “Touch” the high schools more
  - Contact the administration and offer to perform or conduct chorus workshops for them (helps them engage male singers in their choral program)
  - Student discount tickets for all shows

### **4) Mount a systematic pursuit of Grants**

- Research availability and appropriateness of FL state grants
- If ECC is able to identify appropriate grant opportunities but are unable to capture - consider hiring a grant writer
- Continue your local search for corporate sponsors
  - But approach them with a first class color brochure about the chorus
  - Emphasize that you provide unique an art form for the enjoyment of the local area not provided by any other entertainment group and you need their help.

Whether these recommendations will help to improve the ECC in the areas in which they are concerned we cannot tell. We do know that these efforts have been very successful when employed by other organizations however. Thank you for allowing the ISP to assist in your endeavors.

David L. Bechtold, Chairman  
Project Committee.