

Selling Your Chapter

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One of the ongoing challenges for choruses is how to increase community engagement – basically, how do you let your community know you exist. If your chorus isn't the kind of chorus that can easily sell out a 1000 seat venue for your shows, it can be a bit of a challenge to figure out how to let the community know about you.

And why does letting the community know matter? Well, that's where you get your members. And that's where you get your customers (whether they be for your shows, Singing Valentines, or whatever).

Paul Ellinger's "Supercharging your Chapter" talk discusses several ways of improving community engagement. One of the easiest (and least expensive) is to simply sing in public. Seriously. Here's a simple example of something that can be quite effective: We're getting close to the time of year when local farmers markets start cropping up in communities. Send a quartet that you feel represents the quality of your chorus to your local farmers market – do it every week so people become accustomed to your product. Or see if the organizers of the market have a community stage you can perform on (many do).

One caveat for this kind of performance: Your job is to engage your audience and that means that it's probably best to stick to songs that are likely to be familiar to the audience – "barbershop standards" aren't nearly as likely to be appreciated as something from the 60s, 70s or 80s. Similarly, how your group presents itself at these gigs may be as important as the music you sing. If your group intentionally chooses to present as an old school barbershop group (like the Dapper Dans, Main Street, and EVG's own Squares), that sends a message about the kind of experience customers can expect from your group (this is also why Main Street's "Pop Song Medley" has been so successful – it plays against those stereotypes). So does appearing in tuxedos or more casual attire.

For Singing Valentines this year, one of the SeaChordsmen quartets spent 2 hours strolling through Magnolia Village in Seattle singing in a number of shops (one of the quartet members worked with the shop owners ahead of time to confirm it was ok with them). There were mixed results – some venues were too busy for the group to be heard (Starbucks for example) but others were phenomenal (a local pastry shop). And as a result of that 2 hours of performing, the group got four confirmed Singing Valentines orders (and at least two people who said they'd show up to a SeaChordsmen rehearsal).

Another way to improve community engagement involves a bit more work but can be incredibly rewarding: volunteer as a chorus at local community organizations. For instance, this holiday season, the Seattle SeaChordsmen worked as cashiers at a local Christmas tree lot run by the Boy Scouts (full disclosure: the chorus was compensated for its time, but the members volunteered their time). This got the chorus HOURS of face time with the community as they were purchasing Christmas trees. And a valuable opportunity to plug both the chorus

and our upcoming holiday show.

And it should go without saying – whatever it is you do to reach out to the community, make sure you have promotional material at hand – pocket sized flyers for upcoming events, posters, show tickets, etc. People won't remember you once you are gone unless they have a tangible reminder of who you are.

The bottom line is: If you want to increase your community engagement, the best way is to get out into the community. Let yourselves be seen. And do what we do best: sing.

And as always, let me know what you're thinking – does your chapter have any things that they do to engage the community beyond these?

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