

# How People Discover the Industry

Authored by: Judith Ann Kirk, National Golden Circle Chair

Published in NAPO News February—March 2007

## **Build it and they will come...**

It is the beginning of a New Year and just about everyone resolves to *Get Organized*. From homemakers, entrepreneurs, professionals to corporate executives, the message that organization increases productivity, efficiency and effectiveness is being heard. TV programs, talk shows, newspaper articles and websites broadcast the benefits of getting organized. Bookstores and libraries have shelves crammed with “how-to” books and community colleges offer a multitude of workshops and classes promoting this popular theme. Just about every magazine at the supermarket checkout line screams that this is the year to clear up the clutter.

With all this hype, you would think people would know about the organizing industry and the professional organizers that help them get organized. Well, it is not necessarily true that everyone knows about us. One of my clients said incredulously, “I didn’t even know you people existed!” That is enough to spur us on to build a recognizable industry.

In an effort to create The Organizing Authority®, NAPO has devoted time and money towards widespread publicity so that those in need can find a suitable organizer. In the process of building the foundation upon which organizers can construct their businesses, professional organizing is fast becoming not only a household word but also a corporate incentive.

We are slowly tipping the scales. Professional organizing is gaining the spotlight. We have a presence around the world. We are a well-organized association of specialists within the broad realm of professional organizing. We know what we do and how we do it. We have built it, now will they come?

## **Creating an epidemic...**

Malcolm Gladwell in his book *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* reveals how trends become an epidemic. The factors that drove Hush Puppies to success also drive recognition for the organizing industry. The first step in the process involves exposure in multiple avenues. Then there is a need for individuals to identify the importance of the concept and the willingness to pass along that information. This word-of-mouth transmission creates the epidemic. If the timing is right, an idea flies.

Word-of-mouth is a powerful form of communicating. Our experiences, good and bad, are transmitted to others who continue the exponential communication chain to their friends and acquaintances. Experts have documented that most decisions are influenced by recommendations from others. An infectious message spreads quickly whenever people are willing to talk about their experience. As Gladwell expressed, “a small, but precisely targeted push can cause an epidemic.” Can Professional Organizers target the push?

## **The challenge...**

When I presented the question, “How do clients find us?” to Golden Circle members, responses revealed a variety of venues used to promote the industry. Allison Schnipper wrote, “Most of the time, my clients find me through my website, word-of-mouth

referrals and speaking engagements.” Elizabeth Early Sheehan added workshops and volunteer endeavors to the list.

Liz Talbot presented an extensive list including Go Month events, charitable donations, press releases and store promotions. Faith Manierre included networking and a referral system. There is also a tremendous exposure from newspapers, magazines and internet articles. Each one has the potential to enlighten clients that help is available. Nevertheless, can they find us?

Lorraine Fine stated that many times people simply ask, “What do you do?” which provides her the opportunity to talk about the organizing industry. She also stated, “They [clients] turn over a lot of rocks until they find an organizer hiding under one!” We cannot dismiss the fact that there are many people eagerly searching for us. It is imperative to develop and expand a marketing program.

Even though we continue to reconstruct the profession of organizing, educating the public is essential. A huge challenge comes from client expectations once exposed to any marketing effort, especially reality TV shows like Mission: Organization and Clean Sweep. These entertaining programs produce dramatic changes in one hour or less leaving the viewer wanting and seeking the same benefits. Can we deliver?

Some organizers have companies that can perform to these higher expectations while other organizers are sole practitioners. Here is the opportunity to educate potential clients on the many facets of organizing. As a professional, you are obligated to keep things honest and simple. Think twice before complicating a solo practice or taking on jobs that are beyond your ability. In the end, exaggerated marketing hurts all of us. The focus must remain on what is best for the client.

### **Develop strategic alliances...**

The English poet John Donne (1562-1626) wrote *No Man is an Island*. This famous meditation reveals the essential idea that people are not isolated from one another, but entirely interconnected.

Thoughtfully developed partnerships provide resources and support as individuals join together to assist one another to offer a broader set of skills and services. Through collaborative relationships, successful alliances benefit everyone involved and create added value for the clients.

Very few achievements of mankind are accomplished alone. It takes a team! As we develop and grow our organizing businesses, we are faced with challenges of how to promote the organizing industry and best service clients. Team effort produces far greater results than any one individual can accomplish alone.

Barbara Streisand sang it many years ago: “People, people who need people, are the luckiest people in the world.” And, it is people who spread the word and ignite the epidemic.