

January 2010

Gary's Camping Newsletter

Continuous Improvement for Great Camp Leaders

Seth Godin Blog Quote – “Fear mongering is a lousy profession, one that ought to be regulated, if not banned. I'm more in favor of **hope mongering**. 2010 is the year that the world will change. In fact, every year is that year, but this is the only time we'll get to change the world this time.” Those are marching orders: change the world this time; use hope as the tool. – *Gary*

Target Practice – The problem with most paid advertising is that you pay for every pair of eyes that see or hear your message. That's why TV, newspapers, and billboards cost more than they're worth for camps; so few of the “eyes” belong to **parents with kids of the right age** who might be **interested in camp**. Google is a little better, but they don't know anything about the people who use the search words you might be linked to. But Facebook is different. It knows where their user lives, their age and gender. As a result you can place an ad that targets JUST the neighborhoods you know contain good camp prospects, and just the ages (parents) that are most valuable to you. You only pay for “high value” eyes to see your ad, and that turns out to be surprisingly reasonable. Take a look:

<http://www.facebook.com/advertising/?src=pf>

Web Site of the Month – Mercy me. I'm tempted to list a “hall of shame” of the dozens of camp web sites I've visited this past week that:

- 1.) Still have only 2009 dates and rates;
- 2.) Have NO photos that include camp counselors or adults. (Are moms looking for a place to send their kids where they will be UNSupervised? Really?)
- 3.) Lead off with photos of “dangerous” activities. (Which parents are the most fearful? Those returning for another summer, or NEW moms who are seeing you on the web for the first time?)
- 4.) Have pages of text with no photos; (*You've never read a web page like that! Why expect anyone else to read yours?* For help in fixing your web site, see the “most requested articles” at www.garyforster.com)

Nathan Brant suggested this month's example of a GOOD site, partially because of its innovative use of simple video to STAND OUT from the rest of us, but even more because of the MESSAGE from their two junior pitchmen. Take notes and enjoy: <http://www.trcamps.com/> -- *Nathan (formerly at Y-Noah in OH), is now the CEO at South Mountain YMCA Camp Conrad Weiser, ceo@smymca.org, following Sue Edmonds who has retired to MN – congrats to both Sue and Nathan!*

Unique Cabins – Steve Heiny of Flat Rock River Y Camp (IN) sent this web site because reconstructing his dam will result in one huge pile of dirt, getting him thinking of building Hobbit Holes: <http://www.simondale.net/house/>. Steve was disappointed to find out he wasn't the first with that thought. If you'd like a photo-essay on YMCA Camp Collins “Hobbit Cabins” (Rotary Village) visit the “Document Library” at www.garyforster.com and look under “Facilities.”

What Makes a GREAT Summer? – Great memories, built around friendships. Most all of us have been tempted to pay big money for “something new.” Are you? Expensive toys may be fun, but get you no closer to your great summer. Consider spending a fraction of your “something new” budget instead on activities that really bring counselors and campers together. Our long-time friend Randall Grayson, PhD (Randall@visionrealization.com) has exhaustively collected just what camps need. Here's an excerpt from just one \$200 resource, “100 Cabin Activities”:

“We have catalogued numerous tried-and-tested activities which are tailored to create a close-knit environment for small groups of campers. Whether 8 year old boys, or 15 year old girls – we’ve got something for everyone!

“The activities range from the standard to the downright bizarre and are all intended to be roughly 1 hour in length. Some examples include:

- Make a cardboard robot
- Build a raft and sail it across the lake
- Painting from the high-ropes course
- Catapult your food waste
- Black-light dance party

...and the list goes on!

“We also provide you with a very thorough and valuable document explaining the importance of, and philosophy behind cabin activities, along with full explanations for each individual activity.” -- *Randy*.

Want teaching activities that no-body else has? How about “Full Contact Circus Juggling”? Give these some serious consideration (before you buy another big toy?) www.greatcampprograms.com

“**No Money for a Web Site?**” – Joe Murphy from Camp Y-Owasco/Auburn YMCA comes to your rescue with this great tip: “We have a very small day and resident camp in central New York (70-115 campers/week). I was at a loss on how to get a web site cheaply until I found www.Intuit.com (the Quicken people. Other similar services are at www.web.com and Yahoo small business.) We custom-build our new camp website for less than \$200 a year--and we have full control over it and can change it whenever we want! If you're on an even tighter budget, you could build a small site for about \$70/year. Pretty cool! You can see what we did with the software on our new site: www.y-owasco.org. Folks can contact me at joe@auburnymca.net or 315-253-5304 with any questions.”

Confessions of a “Purple Cow” Convert – Dave Bell (Charlotte NC YMCA Camps) lays it on the line and tells how he “converted” to effective camp leadership and marketing: http://campleadership.org/CL/Home/Entries/2009/12/21_Advice_1985_Called_and_They_Want_Their_Marketing_Plan_Back_By_Dave_Bell.html

Calling All Nerds – Mark Scoular writes, “Post your brochure, newsletters, and other publications online for FREE with UNLIMITED hosting of PDFs, PowerPoints, MP3, MP4, etc. www.issuu.com (pronounced ‘issue’). Here’s what our camp looks like there so far: <http://issuu.com/campcarson> (Thanks to Thomas Bentley). And this is the link to the Birmingham Y’s publications site. http://issuu.com/lmcintosh/docs/y_life_birmingham_november_2009.”

Avoid Big Bad Bedbug Mistakes – “I have been remiss with a sincere, ‘thank you,’ Gary. When I called you last summer to talk bed bugs, you saved our lives. We had at least 10 infested buildings and I was spending about 75% of my waking hours on the problem. Then we went to heat treatment (with a lot more design and care) and the effect has been life saving. By all reports, we are now free and clear for several months with plenty of guests to test it. (knock, knock...) We are enjoying a sense of rest I can’t put a value on. Thank you, thank you, thank you!” --*Matt Garcia, Camp Director, YMCA Camp Letts, Matt.Garcia@ymcadc.org*

More Creativity – “This last summer I taught a week long ‘campativity’ titled ‘Lets See What We Can Make Out of This’; with ‘this’ being discarded material found around camp. It was great to watch the kids begin to see past the surface. Remember, just because it looks like a dumpster doesn't mean it isn't an art supply warehouse!” – *singer, songwriter, spiritual guide and artist, Michael Mc Ginnis -- mmcginnis1@yahoo.com* (I think I’m going to make a sign out of that one! – *Gary*)

You Make Your Own Luck – “Camp Carson IN received an out-of-the-blue email from one of our Alumni that we didn't know anything about. He'd received a camp newsletter sent to his mother's house (who'd apparently died 2 years earlier), saw our great stories and our wish list, and donated \$25,000 to establish a bike program - in memory of his brother who was an avid bike rider and also camp Alum!!!” -- Mark Scoular, scoular@ymca.evansville.net

Whole Body Action Plan – As you might imagine, Martha Stewart Inc has a LOT of resources, and she's used them to bring together effective ways that can help people make lifestyle changes. Here's an example: <http://www.wholeliving.com/photogallery/action-plan-week-1>. It includes some cool tools, ideas, and foods for alternatives that feel BETTER than what you're doing now. (That's the main reason it took me so long to get off cheeseburgers as stress relief!)

TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES (want your event listed? Just ask) –

Attending at least one inspiring, networking event is the “fuel” you and your staff need to efficiently and creatively “burn through” the pile of work that lies between you and summer:

YMCA SE “Campfire” Conference Starts This Sunday – Typically the largest gathering, this year's keynotes include a rare opportunity: Joe Lillie is the Senior Day Camp Director for the Magdalena Eke Family YMCA. His annual day camp budget is \$2.4 million, with over 1,100 kids a day, for *one branch!* I often use them as an example of how smart and easy systems can make anyone's camp more enjoyable for campers, parents, and staff. And that essentially eliminates the “we can't take any more kids” excuse! Joel Haber (the Bully Coach) and I, among many others, will be presenting, too. IT'S NOT TOO LATE: <http://www.ymcacampfire.org/Campfire/Home.html>

The Northeast YMCA Camp Conference – This year hosted by the NYC YMCA Camp (home of a new must-see “green” camper lodge), **January 27th through 29th**. Dr. Chris Thurber will be the opening night keynoter, and I and many others will be doing dozens of workshops. Exclusive camp executive sessions hosted by Wheaton Griffin. Thanks to smart planning and “professional courtesy” pricing the total cost (conference, food & lodging) is only \$175 for first person from a camp, \$150 for second, and \$125 for the third. The student rate is \$75 per person. (Single room rates will be available but limited; call for details.) Full info: http://www.garyforster.com/documents/2010_NE_YMCA_Conf_Info.pdf and registration form: http://www.garyforster.com/documents/2010_NE_YMCA_Conf_Reg.pdf More details? Call Jenny Caiafa at 877-30-YCAMP. Closest airport: “SWF” (Newburgh NY, 50 min.), camp shuttle available by reservation.

The 9th Annual Outdoor Education Conference – “To See a World” – at YMCA Camp Greenville February 11th - 13th, 2010. The PEAK conference (Preparing Educators for Adventures with Kids) is a time for teachers and camp OE professionals to network and share ideas, trends and new strategies. Expert-lead sessions include topics like environmental education, administrative issues, Project WILD, grant writing, new trends and ideas, team building, and much more. Noted South Carolina naturalist, Rudy Mancke will provide the keynote address to kick off the event. Call Susan Huter at (864) 836-3291 ext. 106 or shuter@ymcagreenville.org

North American Camp Food Service Conference, March 9 - 11 and Camp Maintenance Conference, March 23 - 25 – both at Camp Chingachgook on Lake George, NY. More than 2,000 camping professionals have benefited from these annual training and networking symposiums endorsed by the ACA, the YMCA, and the Girl Scouts. Culinary and property management workshops focus on safety, technology, equipment use, long-range planning, codes, regulations, and problem-solving for the camping industry. This year's conferences are all about saving money, time, energy, the planet, and your camp. I'll be a presenter at the Maintenance Conference for the 15th year.

Join your colleagues, reward your key staff. Download the brochure (with great photos!) from:
http://www.garyforster.com/documents/2010_Maint-Food_Reg.pdf For more information, please call
518-656-9462, ext 6602 or email clewis@cdymca.org

January's Inspirational Thought – *is courtesy of Rick Deer, Pittsburgh Camping VP:*

“For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you,
plans to give you hope and a future.” -- *Jeremiah 29:11*

“The future's so bright, I've gotta wear shades!” – *Timbuk3, 1986*

(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vwIAyxpiEuc>)

Warm regards,

Gary

Gary Forster, LLC

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