

Seminars Are Not Dead!

by David D. Holland, CFP, CPA/PFS, CLU, ChFC, CAS, CFS, MSFS

I mailed out 7,000 seminar invitations on Monday, January 7th. Four days later -- Friday, January 11th, I had 50 retirees who had reserved seats and another 30 on a waiting list. I'll probably add a second night for those on the wait list, since the planned seminar isn't for another week, and I am bound to get more calls. So where is the "death of seminars" that we've heard about? I'll tell you where it is ... it is over blown and exaggerated.

Agents with a professional seminar system will thrive, while other agents struggle and grasp at other methods of marketing their services. I'm not saying an agent should use seminars *exclusively* to market their financial services. I think the best strategy, like what we tell our clients, is to be diversified. Just as we might recommend an investment allocation of 70% in the US and 30% overseas, it is also prudent to allocate our marketing dollars, and time, in a similar fashion. Perhaps we do a seminar or two a month (or more, I do two to four) and also a radio show, newspaper ads, direct mail, etc. We don't tell clients to put all their eggs in one basket (at least we shouldn't) so we shouldn't do that with our marketing dollars either.

With that said, what *is* a "professional seminar system?" Well, obviously it can't be all that professional and/or effective if no one wants to attend. In my own financial planning practice, I've come to understand that the following steps are necessary to hold a professional, well-received, and effective seminar:

1. Identify target ZIP codes and demographics (age, income, etc.)
2. Identify restaurant that is the best for the target ZIP code
3. Visit restaurant and ensure setup will work
4. Prepare and mail seminar invitation
5. Monitor seminar RSVPs to gauge need for overflow seminar scheduling
6. Place confirmation calls day before seminar
7. Confirm head counts with restaurant
8. Arrive, or have assistant arrive, at restaurant 1 to 1.5 hours before seminar
9. Set up and test all equipment; ensure room is properly arranged
10. Begin seminar on time
11. Conduct a seminar that doesn't last more than 1 hour (max)
12. Tell attendees why they are there, and that you'll offer a consultation
13. Don't have a formal question and answer session
14. Tell them about the free consultation and how it works
15. End seminar and provide follow-up forms so the attendees can ask for appointments
16. Collect all forms and inform group that dinner will be served
17. Tell group that you will stop around, but that you will not be eating with them (you take dinner home)
18. Pay the bill and leave; the group is now the restaurant's responsibility
19. Next day, call or have assistant call to confirm appointment and send letter
20. Make adjustments to seminar for the next time, while desired changes are fresh in your mind

This twenty-step process works very well for me in my personal financial planning practice. I developed the professional seminar system that I've used over the last several years, and I have seen my business grow along the way. Here's a recap of my results: 2003 -- I wrote my first index annuity for a total of \$300,000; 2004 -- I wrote \$3,000,000 in index annuities, and at the end of 2004, I developed and substantially refined the system and procedures I continue to use today. With my "system" in hand, I then wrote \$10 million in index annuities in 2005. For 2006, my production swelled to \$30 million (\$18 million in index annuities and \$12 million in fee-based accounts). And, last year, 2007, I did \$30 million again (\$15 million in index annuities and \$15 million in fee-based accounts).

In 2007, I also launched an Annuity Marketing Organization with my business partner, Mike Mastowski. Now, annuity agents who work with our annuity marketing company, Retiree Adviser Marketing Corporation (RAM, for short), can use the same system I use. The point of my sharing this information with you is not to boast, but rather, to illustrate that wherever your production is today, it can increase if you are deliberate about your business development and vigorously execute your marketing strategies – including the use of a professional seminar system.

About the Author: David D. Holland is an independent financial planner/investment adviser/annuity agent in Ormond Beach, Florida. In 2007, David teamed up with industry veteran, Mike Mastowski, to establish Retiree Adviser Marketing Corporation (RAM). RAM provides independent agents with access to high quality annuity products and helps them expand their services to include real retirement advice. RAM also gives agents the opportunity to access David's marketing and planning system – the same system which allowed him to achieve such an uncommon level of success in his own personal practice. The RAM System includes: A Proven Seminar System (slides, script, invitation, prospect interview questionnaire and seminar training video), a Prospect Marketing Video and a Client Planning System. To get more information about RAM's services, agents are invited to call 888-422-7007 or visit www.retireeadviser.com.