

# **Schussmeisters Ski Club**

## **Advertising and Promotional Campaign 2003**

**Submitted by:  
Thomas Stillwell  
Ed Rost  
Kyle Larish  
Greg Circe**

## **A. Introduction**

The purpose of this study is to analyze the current advertising and promotional practices used by Schussmeisters Ski Club and present a new and improved, strategically developed plan. The main objective will be to increase club membership. Based on market size and historical club performance we've set a goal for 28% growth over two years.

In the evaluation section we explore Schussmeisters' past and present practices, conduct an analysis of the clubs strength's and weaknesses, and get a solid understanding of the conditions under which they operate. In the analysis section we use our own consumer research data, along with information gathered through an interview with Schuss Chairman Jeff Licciardi, to develop objectives and strategies for a successful marketing campaign.

We go on to suggest an IMC (integrated marketing communication) based strategy for implementing the advertising and promotional campaign. Concerning marketing objectives, we indicate that Schuss should expand efforts to attract two new types of potential members as identified through our research on a benefit needs basis. Next we identify the communication objective as being aligned with the needs of the current members, as well as the new target market segments. This objective is met by implementing a strategy which focuses on "low price", "time flexibility", and "beginner friendly" communication messages. Finally we discuss the specific IMC components we feel should be utilized, as well as the specific objectives and strategies to be employed with each. In the conclusion we offer our expectations and further recommendations.

## **B. Evaluation**

Schussmeisters (Schuss) is the Student Association sponsored ski club at the University at Buffalo and has been in operation since the late 1970's. Schuss has been a very successful club, and over the years has built a great reputation. They are actually the largest active ski club in the country; active meaning that skiing is offered all the time, as opposed to occasional ski trips. According to Schuss, the club's main objective every year is to increase membership. Currently the ski club is ranked as the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest in the country having approximately 2,700 members. Membership has been as high as 3,500 in the past. Reaching 3,500 members once again will be the goal of this campaign.

Gaining membership is advantageous to Schuss in several ways, most importantly it supports the club financially. Being a non-profit organization, Schuss succeeds by running the best ski club possible for its members. Increased membership generates higher funds, which creates lower costs, the savings are passed on to members in the form of low price passes and other added benefits. In recent years one of those benefits has been the ability to offer skiing at the exclusive resort "Hollimont". Subsequent benefits occur through better economies of scale when dealing with the many different vendors. Schuss can leverage their increasing weight with suppliers of lift tickets, buses, rentals, equipment purchases, and administrative costs. Additionally, the club will add value in the form of parties, trips, and other bonus items for members.

Schussmeisters considers its biggest strengths to be: size, positive word of mouth, and name recognition. Even before fall classes start, a few incoming freshmen approach Schuss representatives and mention the great things they've heard about the club. This

means Schuss can expect some new members to join upon arrival with little or no effort on the part of the club. In this situation, the club's size creates an intangible benefit as evidenced by great word of mouth and overall awareness among the non-collegiate community.

Schussmeisters believes their biggest weaknesses to be staff turnover, and season passes. Staff turnover is due to the nature of the club. The student run organization must replace directors and volunteers on a yearly basis, making it difficult for leaders to see long term goals all the way through. Season passes are a problem because the most avid skiers and snowboarders will opt to buy their pass directly from one of the mountains rather than joining Schuss. Season passes are an expensive option, so they only draw on a small segment of die-hard skiers.

Schussmeisters membership is offered to students, alumni, faculty and staff, and immediate family members from each of these groups. Distribution of membership is estimated at: 35% students, 26-27% alumni, 2-3% faculty and staff, and 35% family. These requirements for membership are very strict. No one will be allowed to join if they do not fall into one of these categories. This is because Schuss was started as a club only for UB students, it has been expanded to serve the university community, however school officials and club directors believe the benefits of this club should remain inside the school. Therefore there are no plans for expansion outside of UB.

## **C. Analysis**

### **1. Club Level Objective and Strategy**

The club's objective is to increase its membership within the UB community, with new members potentially being students, faculty and staff, alumni, and family members.

Through our discussions with Schuss chairman Jeff Licciardi, we believe that a realistic yet ambitious goal for this year's membership would be an increase of 14%, or 378 new members. Schuss can plan on achieving this objective by creating and implementing a new promotional and advertising campaign that focuses on specific marketing, communication, and IMC driven objectives and strategies based on our market research and analysis.

## **2. Marketing Objective and Strategy**

Based on the nature of the club, its goals, and current standing of Schuss ski club at UB, we believe that the best approach to generating higher membership would be to specifically target new or underdeveloped target markets within the specified community. In order to identify these new target market opportunities and discover other important trends, we have developed and conducted a survey among UB students. When considering the different member segments, as previously mentioned, current students are the most important group. First because they make up 35% of total members, and secondly, they are the driving force behind the next two largest segments: alumni and family.

Survey results were divided into two groups for examination: members and non-members. Our sample population found 77% were nonmembers. From this group we were able to identify two major market segments of non-member students whom we believe represent strong opportunities for new membership. They are as follows: students who believe they would not get good use of membership (these comprised 60% of the

non-member students polled), and students who don't know how to ski (these comprised 44% of non-members polled). Other responses eliminated students as potential members, such as "don't like skiing/don't care", or simply "can't afford it".

In our analysis of this non-member data, we found it particularly interesting that so many nonmembers believed they could not fully benefit from a Schuss membership. This is contradictory to the unlimited-use pass that the club offers. The Schuss pass is good at different mountain locations 10 times per week. For those who may ski only once or twice a season, the pass is obviously not worth the cost, but for those who ski just once every other week, a Schuss pass would be beneficial. The pass runs for \$109 for the season, compared to the prices of lift tickets at Kissing Bridge and Holiday Valley, which are \$24 and \$23 a day respectively, at those rates it would only take 5 days of skiing to pay off the Schuss pass. Although this may seem like a lot to some beginners, the ski season in Western New York usually lasts between 85 and 100 days. Realistically, five trips is not a lot, especially during a long Buffalo winter.

### **3. Communication Objective and Strategy**

In order to effectively gain new members in the above mentioned "new opportunity segments", we must develop a strong communication strategy to address the needs of these individuals and show them that Schuss can in fact satisfy their needs.

We believe that the current Schuss communication strategy is inadequate at effectively demonstrating some important benefits that the club has to offer. Communication channels can only accommodate so much; however we believe there is room to expand and revise. In examining the current communications issued by Schuss we have found

that only one benefit is communicated consistently throughout all their marketing tools: “low price” communication strategy. While we want to explore communicating new benefits, it will be important to retain “low price” as a major communication strategy. Out of 19 members polled, 68% identified this as one of their main reasons for joining.

We believe it necessary to implement a communication strategy which focuses not only on “low price” but on two additional Schuss benefits. They would specifically address the two “new opportunity” target market segments we identified in the non-member polls. One communication strategy will be aimed at those students who feel they would not get good use of their pass. In this case, communications focus on Schuss’ everyday availability, versatility, flexibility, and time-saving ease of use (getting them to and from the slopes with free transport). We’ll refer to this communication strategy as “time flexibility”. Schuss includes some of this benefit information in current communications, but it is never predominantly shown, only appearing in small print.

Regarding the second additional communication benefit, Schuss will address those students who don’t know how to ski. There’s an opportunity to communicate the message that Schuss is a club who welcomes beginners, and provides assistance to them. Speaking with Chairman Licciardi, we found the club offers a “free lesson night” over the course of several weeks during the season. They also offer “guest passes” to students who might want to give skiing a try before they join. We’ll refer to this communication benefit as “beginner friendliness”.

These benefits and others exist, however they are not normally communicated to the students. By featuring these added communication strategies, Schuss will be able to trigger affective and cognitive behavioral dimensions of the new target market segments.

#### **4. IMC Components Objectives and Strategies**

In order to successfully implement the communication strategies discussed above, Schuss will need to develop a set of integrated marketing communication components capable of delivering the three communication messages in a clear and unified manner. All of the tools used must have the same focus: bring in new members from the newly identified target market segments by delivering the specified communication strategies. The major IMC components that Schuss currently uses are advertising, sales promotion, and direct marketing. From the results of our survey we have found that Schuss currently has a very high level of awareness. Over 91% of respondents indicated an awareness of the club. Therefore, we feel the current mix should be realigned to fit the newly identified objectives and strategies in a way that increases interest, desire, and action.

Advertising and Direct marketing will focus on increasing interest and desire by communicating all three strategy factors: “low price”, “time flexibility”, and “beginner friendliness” on all materials. Strategies will include the following methods:

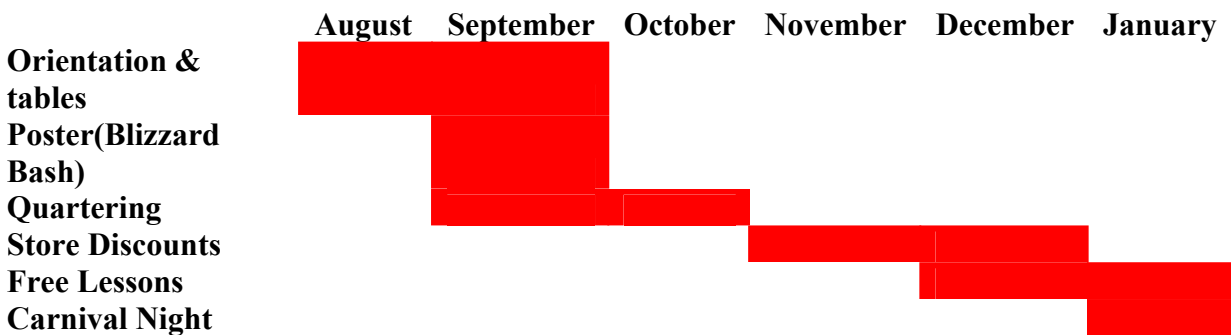
- Quartering (distributing flyers ¼ page size): dropped on desks in lecture halls, in the main buildings such as Knox, NSC, Capen, Student Union. We believe there’s a chance to increase reach by expanding efforts to the less traveled but still important buildings such as Jacobs and CFA.
- Student Union Poster: large display focused on “low price”, “time flexibility”, and “beginner friendliness”.
- On campus cable network: display power point slides as ad banners in between programs. Align these commercial banners with three communication strategies.

- Introduce incentive program offering freebies to past/current members who bring in new first time members. Communicate incentives along with the three communication strategies.
- “Slope Slant”: link to web newsletter e-mailed to all of previous years members including students. Include three communication strategies featured at the top of the page.
- Faculty/Staff mailing: direct mailing sent to last two years members, not including students. Again keep three communication strategies featured here.
- Every dorm mailer: direct distribution of flyers to dorm mail boxes. Predominantly display three communication strategies.
- Mass e-mailing: collect names and e-mail addresses of incoming students at Freshman Orientation. Further increase frequency by reiterating communication strategies.
- Half page ad copy. From the results of our data collection we found that our sample group reads Generation (41%), Visions (18%), and Spectrum (35%) while on campus. Schuss has utilized ads in Visions and Spectrum, but none in Generation so this will make for a good new opportunity.

Promotional and direct selling activities will be focused on achieving action. These events/activities should all come equipped with the ability to sign up new members on the spot. While the three main communication strategies have already been in place in advertisements, these promotions will be more concerned with providing added value incentives to join.

- **Blizzard Bash:** Large scale party at PJ Bottoms during fall semester, open bar is free for members, others have the opportunity to join at the door (credit cards accepted).
- **Carnival Night:** Members party in February at the slopes, many promotional giveaways including equipment, merchandise, prizes, and apparel. Anticipation for the party is key as students will have to be planning ahead for this one.
- **Union Tables:** set up during events in order to talk to students. Representatives can give individual attention to prospective members, providing any and all club benefit information needed. Allowed ten tables per semester. Sign up on the spot.

### 5. Timeline



### 6. Budget

Chairman Licciardi explained that the club currently uses a top-down rollover budget technique. Using this method, the directors of Schussmeisters always spend the excess earnings compared to the last year (if there are any), on various advertising and promotional tools. Based on the information obtained through our surveys, if Schussmeisters was planning on using this technique for the remainder of the year, we would suggest advertising in the Generation newspaper. An ad coving 2/3 of a page is

only \$205/week. At 41% readership rate, Generation is read more than any other publication.

However, we believe that although Schussmeisters has had success with their current budget method, it would be more beneficial to the organization if they switched to a Marginal Returns budget strategy. Adopting this strategy, an organization can more easily determine the point where advertising no longer has a beneficial effect. This would ultimately save the organization money, while at the same time optimizing the returns from a marketing campaign.

## **D. Conclusion**

We believe the objectives and strategies discussed here will provide a sound and practical means to achieving increased membership for Schussmeisters Ski Club. Our methods are based on consumer research, a solid evaluation of the current standing of Schussmeisters for the 2003—2004 season, and following the principals of IMC based marketing. This approach, if carefully executed by the Schuss directors and staff, will have a direct and positive effect on their current promotional and advertising campaign.

In regards to reaching the membership goal of 28% over two years, we would carefully project that this goal can be achieved with proper management. Schuss' biggest weakness in the execution of this plan will be their inherent lack of stability in leadership as seen through yearly turnover. Schussmeisters must address this internal issue if they hope to reach their long term membership goals.