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AN INSIDER'S OPINION ON THE UIA

BY EDIE TOLCHIN

Many of you know me as “The Sourcing Lady” (sm). Earning a living in the inventions industry since 1997, and having been involved in manufacturing, safe sourcing and import/export for the past 35+ years, I have seen it all. Or so I thought, when I became an officer of the Board of Directors of the United Inventors Association three years ago.

At the end of 2009, there was an open call for new members to run for a three-year commitment, as several former Board members' terms either had expired, or they chose not to run again. Now I know why...

We presented our credentials and since there were so many openings (again, I wondered, why?) most if not all of us were voted in.

I attended every call-in meeting over the years (except for just ONE, where I was participating in another inventor education-related function), took part in all of the annual warm-climate jaunts--called “Annual Board Meetings”--at my own expense, which many of you can understand would prove challenging for a small business owner in today's economy.

I learned we would be required to participate, at the very least, in several conference calls--typically every other month--to provide our votes, work on committees, etc.--and to attend the above-mentioned annual Board meetings, typically held in January of each year in warm, sunny Florida, for those who could cover their own expenses for the flights, car rentals, lodging, fine-wine dinners and the like. Those who could not participate in these extravagant outings were just not part of the in-crowd--that is, unless, I felt, they provided substantial “donations,” or had “adequate resources to qualify” (as I have heard it called). The so-called committees were headed by either yes-men, or those who might be in a position to grease palms for favors. There was little, if anything, accomplished on these committees, as follow-through was poor, and missions were not firmly set. Also, without going into detail, the goal of one of the committees was to screen and review qualifications of applicants for prospective corporate members for certification. Initially, the committee members were, in fact, allowed to do their job. However once it was determined that some of us did not routinely approve some of the candidates perhaps due to questionable backgrounds or lack of industry experience, the committee suspiciously ceased to exist. But, new membership

(and thereby, my guess, commissions!) appeared to grow by leaps and bounds, without the approval/assistance of said committee. Who was now in charge of approving corporate memberships?

I, personally, never got involved in the financial issues of the UIA. That was left up to the Treasurer, and (I believe), the Executive Committee. However (just my guess, and) my opinion was that a goal of the Executive Director was to increase the (paying) membership of the UIA, as it would seem logical that if he did, the bigger the players he might snare (read: successful, corporate sponsors with considerable means), perhaps the greater his commissions might be. Did he really want to help the independent inventor? It is common knowledge that UIA membership to the independent inventor is FREE! So, the greater effort was put towards increasing which type of membership?

As most of you know, in my day job as owner of EGT Global Trading since 1997, I have assisted hundreds of inventors in developing, sourcing, safely manufacturing and legally importing their products from Asia. In 2009 when I ran for the UIA Board, my platform was to help educate inventors on these very issues on behalf of the Board, since I have been providing classes, seminars and lectures to inventor clubs and industry trade shows across the country for the past 15 years. Half a year ago, our Executive Director, (it appears to me) made a deal with a very large online sourcing corporation, to provide “sourcing webinars” to UIA members who may be novices in the China manufacturing arena. Obviously, again in my opinion, this was done as a favor in return for this corporate sponsor's large “membership” donation. When the topic of sourcing webinars to be conducted by this new UIA corporate member was brought up a month or two before, at one of our Board conference calls, I offered to volunteer to work in conjunction with this new company, since providing this type of education is what I do for a living. Not only was I completely ignored (nice pat on the head), but the UIA blog advertised not one, but TWO of these webinars on behalf of this new sponsor with very deep pockets. Again, I asked if I could assist, and I was told: 1) “we will look into it,” and 2) “the UIA does not allow members to solicit business through webinars, and other similar means.” If anyone were to take a look at the ads for said sponsor's sourcing webinars, and/or to attend the actual online webinar (held over the summer of 2012), even a kindergartner could see that it was an attempt for this massive company to expand its business--a blatant ad--all while I believe the Executive

Director may have been enjoying his large commission as a result of this new gargantuan member. The webinars were purely free advertisements; from someone with 35 years of experience who attended these webinars out of curiosity, I feel they provided very little if any inventor education and a whole lot of “why you should use our service.” No significant mention was made to product safety when working with a China factory, which is a huge issue.

While as a sole-proprietor, I do not have the same means as many of the other Board members and have therefore been unable to “sponsor” as well as they, I feel there clearly is something inappropriate going on here.

Over the years, it became apparent that women were not welcomed as Board members, which explains why there are and were only a few over the years, especially while governed (or should I say “manned?”) by the current Executive (nominating) Committee. A misogynistic atmosphere “so thick it could be cut with a knife” permeated. And, if we didn’t donate, beyond our annual membership dues like most of the “Old Boys Network” big-leaguers were able to do, we were simply patronized; it was hoped we might just disappear, as some women Board members actually did! (For the record, I did not. I served my entire 3-year term).

When a few Board members and I were told that we would not be nominated to run for another term at the end of 2012 (even though we did ask to serve again), I immediately knew it was because I am a woman, an outlier, and was unwilling to accept the status quo. I will never be a ‘yes man’--it is not anatomically possible, alas! Nor were the few other Board members who were not re-nominated.

I recently inquired, out of curiosity, if any women applied for the new (2013) Board positions, and was told, “yes, one-however she simply did not have the ‘resources’ we would like from a prospective Board member.” Money? Fame? Do qualifications and experience not count? Come on, boys!

Please note, I must reiterate that the above is JUST MY OPINION. I do not have deep pockets, but I am an honest and reputable businesswoman and writer, unafraid and quite willing to tell it like it is. Believe it or not, age sometimes has its advantages. Serving as an officer on the Board of Directors of the United Inventors Association has been a very enlightening experience and I regret not a second. “I am WOMAN, hear me roar!” This is my First Amendment right. I challenge women inventors, women industry service providers, and others, to prove me wrong. The slate is set for the next three years. Please try again at the end of 2015! And, let’s restore the original mission of the UIA when it began over two decades ago: HELP THE INVENTOR, but not by funding next year’s country club membership dues. You have not seen or heard the last of me – stay tuned for more tidbits in Inventors Digest.

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10. Be sure to tell your reader clearly what to do next at the end of the ad.

If you've ever growled while browsing a website, you know how important it is to have a smooth, step-by-step flow of information and instructions. If you are writing a teaser ad—which is a brief classified ad or small display ad intended to get the reader to visit your website—then tell him to visit it. For example, a prototyper might place a classified ad in Popular Mechanics that reads:

Prototyping for inventors and experimenters. Visit my website to see examples of my work, www.protos4u.com

In 15 relatively inexpensive words you have attracted the attention of a select readership, and aroused sufficient interest so that many will visit your website landing page. Your website can then use any number of pages, each of which would cost thousands of dollars if run as an ad in a magazine.

If you are preparing a sell-sheet or a display ad, tell your reader at the end to contact you. For example: "Just e-mail me for more information, or to answer your questions.

JackL359@aol.com. Or phone me at 203-264-1130." Keep it friendly and informal. And always include your phone number, at least when you're starting out. Readers are frustrated today by the barriers that so many companies put up to avoid paying a human being to handle phone calls. Such frustration means lost contacts and lost sales.

Conclusion:

The profitability of every action-demanded ad rests on four main points:

1. the cost of the ad;
2. the effectiveness of the ad copy, and its illustration, if any;
3. your gross profit per unit sold; and
4. the quantity sold as a result of your ad.

Keep your costs low by using the two-step process whenever you can. Learn to write effective ad copy, or have it edited by an expert; (e-mail me if you need one). Monitor your profit from each ad. And experiment with different taglines to maximize your ad's effectiveness. It's your buck. Get more bang.

Next issue: How to design an effective website landing page.

2 Critical Steps to getting your NEW PRODUCT "out there"

1 GET IT MADE

Contact Edie Tolchin – "The Sourcing Lady" (SM) for sourcing, China manufacturing, product safety issues, packaging assistance, quality control, production testing, final shipment inspections, freight arrangements, import services and delivery to your door!

2 GET A WEBSITE!

Contact Ken Robinson – While your order is being manufactured, you need to start working on your WEB PRESENCE! Get people talking about your product on Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Google+), get good search engine placement (SEO)!

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DHANA COHEN, founder of The Next Big Zing dot com knows a thing or two about great innovation, her website searches out and finds these great products and awards only the best "retail ready" products and is sharing a new partnership with Melinda Knight from womentorz.com, called Women Inventorz Network. A new platform to support, inspire and build the brands of women inventors. The network is the only program of its kind to award women inventors each month and the culmination of an Academy Award style Gala in Chicago February 2014!!



EDIE TOLCHIN, "The Sourcing Lady" (SM), "invented" EGT Global Trading in 1997, with a goal to link U.S. inventors with Asian manufacturers, to provide an exclusive import service for sourcing, quality control, production testing and safety issues, manufacturing, international financing, air/ocean shipping, customs clearance arrangements, and dock-to-door delivery. www.egtglobaltrading.com

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