

The Exchange Club

By Sue McCarthy

I am always amazed at the amount of mail that I get from the department stores as well as the large chain stores like Chicco's and J. Jill. A small magazine showcasing their new items, with maybe twenty full-color pages from Chicco's arrives at least eight times a year. Can you imagine what that costs? The reason that they ask for your address when you shop, and spend thousands on catalogues and mailings is because direct mail can be your most effective form of advertising. That's why they call it direct mail. It goes directly to the customer who is interested in doing business with you. The same people who have been in your store and liked it enough to want to be on your mailing list.

The ability to contact and communicate with a customer can be priceless. The customers are your business. So the number of customers you have coming through your doors will determine your level of success.

A few years ago, in an effort to increase our mailing list, we developed a frequent shoppers club called the Exchange Club. There is a \$30.00 yearly membership fee to become a member. Consumers today are already conditioned to pay membership fees to many of the large chain stores like Sam's Club or Costco. And this is just to walk in the door! We went one step further and offered 10% off to our Exchange Club members on all purchases, including sale items.

There are many additional benefits for Exchange Club members. These include invitation only preview sales in the spring and fall. These sales allow members to get first pick on the new merchandise of the season. There are also members only mailings telling them of upcoming events or previews. When our top, pant or dress racks get full we allow Exchange Club members an additional savings on that particular merchandise.

You're Invited...

Some memberships are given away. This may be for a birthday, a person spending a lot or just to promote a sale. In the past we would have given them 10% off anyway but it means so much more when they get the Red Card signifying their Exchange Club status.



There are many red signs hanging throughout the store that state, "Ask about our Exchange Club." Employees get a five-dollar store credit or a three-dollar cash incentive per each membership sold. At the end of the month we even offer a bonus to the employee who sold the most memberships. Recently we had an employee who sold ten memberships one Saturday! That is a lot of extra revenue for her as well as *Women's Closet Exchange*.

The Exchange Club is just another profitable idea that I developed after attending an NARTS conference. To date we have sold thousands of memberships and most people renew yearly.

Sue McCarthy, owner of *Women's Closet Exchange* in St. Louis, MO, is NARTS Treasurer and Outstanding Service Award winner. She has opened seven new locations, moved several and currently operates four shops in one plaza: ladies', plus size, children/maternity and furniture.