



How to Fill Your Bar on a Quiet Night With Little or No Budget!

WRITTEN BY K. ALEXANDER

Everybody has Quiet Nights

It's no secret that most bars are packed on a Saturday night and somewhat slow on a Monday or Tuesday night. The back-to-work drain, combined with exhaustion from the excitement of the past weekend, has taken a toll on patrons. Preferring to stay home on the sofa and rest, their absence contributes to "quiet nights" at the bar.

While nearly all bars have one or two quieter nights a week, they also have busy nights. Bars go broke when the costs of the quiet nights exceed the profits from the other nights. Often the difference between a bar closing down or being successful is the turn around of one of these quieter nights.

In this report, you're not going to find a list of bar promotions. There have been more promotions dreamed up than anyone can count. This report is about tapping into your customers' basic needs and adapting promotions to fit those needs, specifically on a quiet night. Understanding what motivates your customers and using this to draw them out on a quiet night will allow you to develop an actionable plan.

The Easy Nights

Every venue has nights when patrons seem to flood the streets in abundance. Feeling upbeat, dressed to party and with wallets filled with cash, the easy nights are the ones that people have set aside for going out, regardless of any promotions you or your competitors have planned. Your promotions are not aimed at getting them out of the house, just into your venue instead of your competitors. Easy nights are often your typical Thursday, Friday, Saturday combination.

Why Don't Traditional Promotions Work?

No matter how your entire week pans out, there are always select

nights that are easier to pull in a crowd than others. Why is it that you can't just take a flawless promotion from a Saturday and repeat it on Tuesday with an equivalent amount of success?

There are several reasons but financial pressures and work commitments are at the top of the list. Patrons set a budget upon their time and money for entertainment, and often that budget is blown by Sunday morning. Any advertising you do for days that have not been mentally set aside by your customers for going out, falls on deaf ears. We are bombarded with thousands of marketing messages everyday and we unconsciously choose which ones we want to allow through to our conscious mind.

For example, if you are in the market for a new TV you will allow the hundreds of adverts you see for TV's through to your front of mind. They seem to pop up everywhere, in the newspaper, on the radio, on TV and in the mail. When you're in the market there seem to be specials everywhere. But once the new HD plasma TV is sitting in your lounge, you mentally tune out advertising for televisions. You turn the "in the market for a TV" filter off. Of course if there is an outstanding TV advert you might take note of it, otherwise you are dead to that advertising. It works the same way for your venue. You either need an outstanding promotion or another way to break through the "not going out tonight" filter.

But this isn't all gloom and doom, because regardless of budgets and financial pressures, people will always find more time and more money for the things they really want to do.

Understanding the Habits of Customers

The other major factor stopping people from coming out on quiet nights is habit. People are creatures of habit, and if given the choice of doing something new or doing whatever they normally do, they will

tend to stick with what they know. Normal is comfortable for people and breaking a habit is not the simplest of tasks.

A habit cannot be easily broken but it can be more easily replaced. For example, smoking is a habit. For someone who is trying to quit, just stopping outright is difficult. Although, if the smoker chews a piece of gum instead of smoking, then in a short while they can replace their cigarette habit with a gum habit. This new habit increases the likelihood of stopping smoking.

So you don't want to *break* your customer's habits on the days they're not at your bar. You want to *replace* the habit of what they do now, probably sitting at home watching the TV, with the new habit of coming to your bar.

Two Obstacles

The two obstacles that you have to overcome in order to get more patrons in your bar on a quiet night are:

1. Breaking through your potential customer's advertising filter so they are aware you are hosting an event.
2. Have an event that is habit-forming to replace their existing "stay at home" habit.

The Event

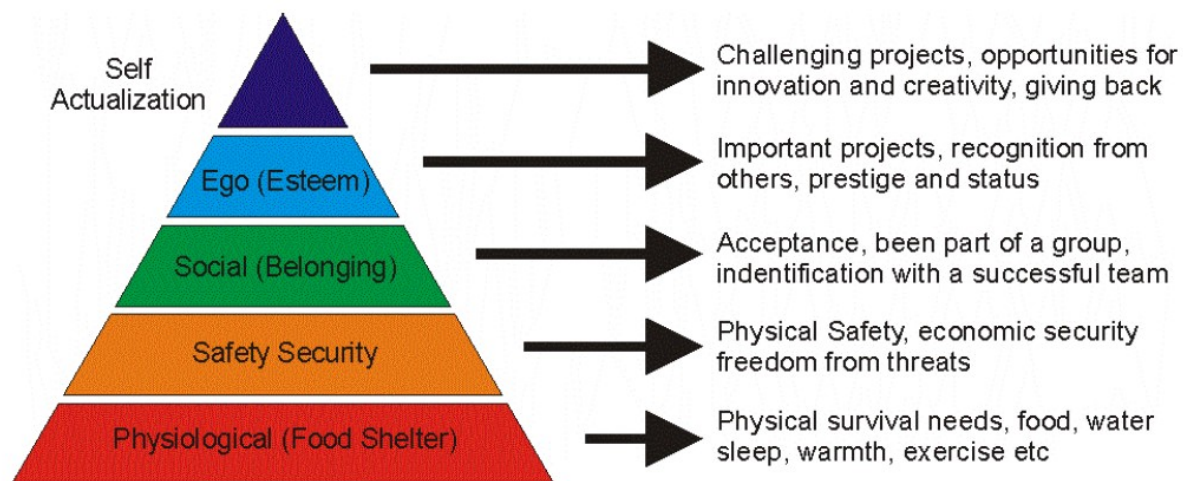
Which types of events are habit-forming and what are the ingredients needed?

Habits are most easily formed by repetitive action that fulfill embedded needs. The need to eat leads to the habit of eating breakfast, lunch and tea at set times. The need for sleep leads to set bed times and bed time rituals. Plus there are other inbuilt needs in

your customers that you can tap into, to attract and hold those customers at your venue.

Basic Needs

In 1943, American psychologist Abraham Maslow published 'A Theory of Human Motivation' where he outlined a 'Hierarchy of Needs.' By studying people such as Albert Einstein and Eleanor Roosevelt, he identified a pyramid of five levels of needs ending at the top with Self-actualization. After filling the bottom levels with the most basic physiological needs of food, shelter, sex and security, he identified that we start looking to fill our 'Belonging' and 'Esteem' needs.



It is no coincidence that marketers often link their products to these basic needs as much as possible.

Advertisers often leave out details on how their products work, and instead focus on how they fulfill your basic needs of 'Health, Wealth and Relationships'.

*"Buy our washing machine and it'll add 20 years to your life,"
"How would you feel driving this car?"*

These advertising lines having nothing to do with the product and everything to do with our hard-wired needs. Subway's advertising has always been based around losing weight, focusing on being a health provider rather than a fast food supplier. Even McDonald's is now repositioning itself as a "Healthy Choice."

Sense of Community

Many venues have a buzz or feel about them that is immediately evident when you walk through the door. It emanates from the patrons rather than from the venue itself. It's not tied directly to décor or customer service, and not to the location or the type of venue. Indeed, many venues feel like a morgue when empty, but a palace once full. This feeling is described in the work of McMillan and Chavis as 'Sense of Community' and has four interconnecting parts:

- 'Membership'
- 'Influence'
- 'Integration and fulfillment of needs' and
- 'Shared emotional connection.'
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These parts are interconnecting in that if you strengthen one part, you strengthen the others and vice versa if you weaken one, you weaken the others. The venues that have this 'Sense of Community' are simply fulfilling the hard wired basic needs as described by Maslow, in particular our 'Social' and 'Esteem' needs.

A simple way to strengthen the attributes of 'Sense of Community' in your venue is to enforce rules and boundaries. Don't worry I'm not suggesting you string out a whole lot of new rules to post on the wall of your bar; nobody wants that, least of all your patrons. However, rules and boundaries either stated or implied enhance personal safety. People don't like to admit that they like rules, on the contrary, but the fact is they do. We all like to know where we stand. In any

given situation, people feel safer if they know how liberally they can speak and act. We all feel uncomfortable if we don't know the rules.

If you've ever been to a place of worship where you weren't sure of the protocols, it's uncomfortable. One of the reasons many venues fail so quickly is because their rules and protocols are not in alignment with what their customer's expect. They market themselves as a mosque but act like a synagogue.

The world-wide popularity of Irish themed bars stems from the fact that patrons from anywhere in the world know what they will get in this type of venue, Customers know the rules and boundaries before they even walk in. It is a safe choice!

In general, rules and boundaries support each of the different parts that make up the feeling of 'Sense of Community'. The fact that there are rules implies there are outsiders. People who don't or won't follow the rules are excluded. This is important to feeling part of the group, to a feeling of membership. If everybody is allowed to be in the group, then there is no exclusivity to the group. With no outsiders there are no insiders.

Shared emotional connection is created in group experiences. When the group tastes success the individual tastes success and vice versa. The group influences the actions of the individuals and conversely individuals shape the group. Each leg of 'Sense of Community' is strengthened with the imposition of rules and boundaries.

In a practical sense this is exactly what venues are trying to achieve by catering to a select part of the market. Bar owners know that if you try and cater for everybody, you're catering for nobody. You have to define your ideal customers to the exclusion of others and go after them. Night clubs normally target different music audiences.

Bars and taverns may cater for, blue collar workers or sports fans or under 25's or gay bikers or whatever. Each group has its own set of rules, some set by the venue and many set by the group themselves. And all venues cater for a range of sub groups, sometimes on different days, invariably some at the same time.

So how can you introduce rules in a way that is acceptable to, and welcomed by your patrons without appearing draconian, authoritative or petty? You use 'Team Events'.

“Team Events”

Team events, what are they? Any event you hold that requires patrons to form into teams. Team events by their nature require more rules and boundaries than the same event run on an individual basis. By running a team event you have to implement more rules for the event to even work. Here in lies a critical difference to your average promotion. For example, imagine having bar trivia where anybody can come into your venue at any time and play by themselves. Buzztime, for example, has few rules.

However, what if you run a hosted trivia event with a quiz master where patrons gather in teams on a set day and time, and at a set place. There are all sorts of additional rules that are established and implied such as the need to be on time, being quiet when questions are read, no calling out answers and you have to work as a team. You win when the team wins, you lose when the team loses. Events with these parameters offer membership in the team and in the wider group, a shared journey and a fulfillment of the 'Belonging' and 'Connection' needs. In teams, individuals feel that they have influence over the group and conversely are influenced by the group. Esteem is increased through participation and competition. Don't underestimate the power of these primal drivers.

By making any promotion a “team event” you automatically start to implement a ‘Sense of Community’ and fulfill your customer’s hardwired needs. Accordingly, instead of a Karaoke night, imagine the difference if it was Team Karaoke or instead of Trike races it is now Team Trike races.

The other component to creating an habit-forming event is repetition. You want your team event to be held every week at the same time on the same day. Since the event will be held every week it will require some component of change to keep it fresh. If the event is Team Karaoke it is new songs each week, if it is Team Trivia, it is new questions each week, if it is Trike racing, new course layouts... but the overall rules and protocols stay the same.

If you are creating an event from scratch you will have to be imaginative. Team events need to be thought out, they are normally competitive with a winner and prizing. You need a way of scoring and you need rules to facilitate different scenarios that may arise. Alternatively you can look for existing events that have all the structures in place that you can just modify for your venue.

“Build It and They Will Come”, NOT

It doesn’t matter what type of event you put on, you have to promote it. On a ‘busy night’, potential customers are going out anyway, if not to your establishment, then to your competitor’s. Your goal on these nights is to have a more attractive promotion than your opposition. Typically the venue with the best promotion on these nights draws the best crowd. But on a quiet night you already know that holding the event and simply advertising it will not fill the bar. You have to go further to break through your customer’s “I’m staying at home tonight” filter to get them to your bar. And you have to get them to your venue

so you can replace their old habits with your new one.

As previously stated, to break through your customer's filters, to get to their front of mind, where you can entice them to take action, you either need an outstanding promotion or another tactic.

In this case there is one very simple but highly effective way of promoting your venue that works perfectly with a team event. It is to use a "personal invitation".

The Personal Invite

When you talk with somebody one-on-one, you communicate with them at a conscious level. This means you, and the person you are speaking with, have your filters turned off and your guards lowered. When somebody you know and trust gives you an invitation, you are burdened with a level of obligation. Whether you accept the invitation or not, you still feel the obligation. The greater the friendship you have with the person who initiated the invite, the greater the obligation.

As a bar owner, when you invite a patron to a team event, you only need to ask one person to come as a team. And in doing so, you have effectively asked 3, 4, or whatever the team number is, at the same time. The tighter the relationship between you and the patron the greater the chance they will respond in a positive way. If you personally invite 3 or 4 patrons to form teams of 4 or 5 members, then you've got the basis of an event.

When patrons ask their friends to join them on the team, those friends are under the same obligation that your patrons were under when you asked them. Those friends have their filters lowered and are more likely to come based on an invite from someone they are close with, as opposed to seeing or hearing an advertisement in the paper or on the radio. With the widespread use of social networking sites such as

Facebook and Twitter, the power of the personal invite has greatly increased with response and growth times greatly reduced.

Many people think this is too simple or they are not sure how to ask, but this is the most powerful way to get somebody in any venue. In many cities it is still common for bars to employ people to go out on the streets and personally invite people to a nightclub event. They do that because it works. You don't need to go big and expensive you can start small.

A Real World Example

A small suburban bar and grill with a maximum capacity of just over 100 people decided to run hosted bar trivia on a Tuesday night. This represents a day that, at that point in time, was otherwise very quiet and losing money. A day that had seen dozens of 'busy night' promotions without success. The bar manager asked three patrons to form teams to help him out and get the night started as a personal favor. As an added bonus, the bar manager also offered the first round of drinks on him for helping out.

Only one team turned up on the first bar trivia night (although the other two patrons did form teams in later weeks.) The quiz master running the first night went around the venue and invited the few people in the bar to join the quiz. He enticed them with the chance to win a beer and assured them it was free to enter and they could leave at any time. He got three more teams to join; one team had only one member. With four teams participating, the night wasn't a complete disaster – but it certainly wasn't a success.

The bar manager persevered with the night and over the coming weeks the teams grew in size. Several teams had to be split into two teams because they were getting too big, and several new teams joined the bar trivia night. After 12 weeks, the venue started to hit capacity. This bar's Tuesday night has now been full for around 3

hours every week for over two and half years. Teams now book tables in advance to make sure they don't miss out. It's not the biggest take of the week – but has gone from a night that was costing the bar money to a night that is very profitable.

In this case the bar held a habit forming team event, a [hosted bar trivia quiz](#). The bar manager personally invited just three patrons to form teams. The quiz master, on the night, personally invited a few other customers at the venue to join the quiz. The patrons who joined the quiz went out and personally invited their friends to help them out. The event grew. Success!

Recap

- On quiet nights, promote your venue around Team events.
- Get initial customers to come via personal invites.
- Numbers build further via continuing customer invites...
- The team environment builds a "Sense of Community."
- Your customers replace their old habit, of staying at home, with the new habit of coming to your Team events.

Useful Links:

<https://www.pubquizpro.com>- trivia quiz resource for bars and taverns

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sense_of_community- more info about Sense of Community

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maslow's_hierarchy_of_needs – more info about Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs