

The Business of Rotary

What business are we really in? This appears to be a simple question but most organizations get it wrong. Terry O'Reilly, advertising specialist and CBC host of The Age of Persuasion, has talked extensively about marketing and advertising. For example, Molson is not in the beer business – it is in the party business. Just look at their commercials to check out the parties. Do we Rotarians know what business we are in? The answer is complex, isn't it? Incoming President Ian Riseley talks about it extensively when describing his Presidential Theme – Rotary: Making a Difference.

Why is this important? It is because the products, or the services, that organizations provide are not what people buy. They buy a feeling. Molson is selling fun. Nike is selling motivation. Michelin is selling safety. Coke is selling happiness. This is critically important to understand for effective marketing and advertising of Rotary. We need to understand what we are trying to sell when we recruit new Rotarians.

President Ian refers to all the things that we do – playgrounds, schools, water, sanitation, health and many others. These activities make a difference in the lives of people. That is what we do. But it is not what our business is.

I really like "Rotary: Making a Difference." It is a simple clear message. We all have our own unique reasons for joining Rotary. It could be fellowship, or opportunities to help our community, or supporting folks in need. Why do we do this? Because it is satisfying. It feels good when we do these things. Therefore, the way that I see Rotary is that we are in the satisfaction business. We can talk to prospective Rotarians about 1.2 million worldwide, 35,000 clubs, comradery, leadership, socializing or just plain service. It all boils down to satisfaction. Making a Difference is what we do and our product is satisfaction. That is what our business is all about and that is what we need to sell, I think. I am suggesting that we need to think carefully about how we sell Rotary to prospective new members.