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Marketing News

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Take this job, **love** it



Dianna Stampfer, during a "tour of duty," promotes West Michigan on a local radio show.

Work is more like *fun* for these marketers

By CATHERINE ARNOLD
Staff Writer

Imagine that wherever you go, gates open without question and services—facials, pedicures, vacations—are rendered without charge. Your life is that scene in *The Wizard of Oz* in which Dorothy, the Tin Man and the Cowardly Lion sit in chaise lounges, having their hair curled and nails buffed to a shine. Imagine you have Dianna Stampfer's job as marketing and media director for the West Michigan Tourist Association, what she calls the best marketing

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Photo by Michael A. Worman

LOYALTY MARKETING

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Do what you enjoy, enjoy what you do

job arose.

Stampler isn't the only one who likes her job, who thinks her daily 9-to-5 vices for a slot as one of the most fun jobs in marketing around. It helps if your job passes the lottery test, says Maggie Neilson. "I always thought I liked my previous jobs," says Neilson, marketer for a microfinance accelerator that raises money for organizations that loan money to poor women so they can start businesses. "However, if I'd won the lottery, I don't know whether I'd have gone back to them. But with this job, I'd be back here the next day."

Marketers with fun jobs have fun on the job, whether they are feeling enriched by the work (by marketing microfinancing or a healthy lifestyle via bicycles) or enjoying the proximity to wonderful food or luxurious services (by marketing a world-renowned cooking academy or an entire region's leisure industry).

Stampler says her job—covering visitor groups in the six counties of Western Michigan—is perfect for her because she naturally keeps busy, anyway. Consider a partial recounting of her calendar for 2009:

- February meant a stay at a spa in Bay Harbor with a guest, a meal and a luxurious sleep. Then Stampler wrote articles and press releases that appeared on her organization's Web site, some of which generated articles in local publications.

- Memorial Day weekend, she and a guest had the full spa treatment and golfed three courses at a spa in Acme. This experience provided information that she's used in promotions for Spa Awareness Month, coming up in November.

- In warm, breezy June, Stampler took a three-day windsurfer cruise on Lake Michigan's Grand Traverse Bay (called "nearly pristine" by the nonprofit Watershed Center Grand Traverse Bay)—over which she pitched the tall ship and its story to media contacts. The trip, she says, resulted in \$20,000 in media coverage for the tall ship.

- For the Fourth of July she brought her own and another family to a dude ranch in Kentucky, where they played golf, rode horseback, swam, took in a rodeo and fireworks. As a result, she was able to follow up on a PRNewswire query in August from a New York magazine about Midwest dude ranches.

- Stampler is often interviewed for a television show. In August, she appeared on a Grand Rapids station, discussing Michigan food festivals. She also gives 40 presentations on lighthouses per year, sharing her knowledge of Lake Michigan lights.

Trips to Mackinac Island, voyages on Lake Michigan car ferries

and a VIP winery tour by limo have also all been part and parcel of Stampler's weekly paycheck.

"Everything I do (in the 41 counties), whether I'm driving around or watching TV, applies to my work," Stampler says. An evening of watching Food Network, for example, means looking for Michigan connections and thinking about the area restaurants that could be featured. She then calls to suggest they come out to Michigan to cover something in particular.

As a result, those expenses are paid for or are tax-deductible as non-reimbursed business expenses.

Stampler landed this gig in 1997 by answering an ad in the paper. Previously, she did public relations for a Michigan school district. Also, she grew up with a father who worked in radio, which, she says, prepared her for her busy life of working around the media.

Being surrounded by good things—savory food, perhaps—on the job can't be a bad thing. So handling communications for Hyde Park, N.Y.'s Culinary Institute of America (CIA) is a great thing—at least Communications Manager Heather Rafferty thinks so.

She regularly dines on students' creations at the five on-campus restaurants, including Riservante Cantina de Medici, where she's sampled northern Italian beans pasta and trapanese served "in a big bowl"—the best dessert Rafferty says she's had anywhere. The restaurants are a big part of the CIA experience: "You never

want to leave without eating something here."

Sexy ideas for promotions emerge naturally, she says, from spending time among the students. Winners of student recipe contests get promoted, along with the food industry companies—say, a canned bean producer—that sponsor the contests. The winning recipe is released to the media, along with the student's name and bio and information on the sponsoring company.

Aside from the atmosphere of working in a place where top-quality food is created every day, Rafferty says having access to industry celebrities—such as Sam Moulton, host of New York City-based Food Network's *Seri's Sero's*, or Steve Ellis, a chef and the founder and CEO of Denver-based Chipotle Mexican Grill Inc.—makes work that much more excit-



Maggie Neilson, far right, shows children in India her camera while on a trip to assess living conditions and meet residents, which helps her more effectively market and raise funds in the United States for loans in these regions.

ing. There's also the added panache of often hosting TV crews on campus; in the spring, for instance, the Food Network spent three days there filming its show, *The Best Of*.

Working in a food area isn't new to Rafferty. Before starting at the CIA in 2001, she worked on food and beverage accounts for New York public relations agencies for nearly 10 years, and was a dietitian before that. Now, she's the looking at food from a different angle: "celebrating the joy of food."

Marketing what you love and believe in makes work a joy, agrees Rorend Curry, marketing manager at Eugene, Ore.-based bicycle maker Burley Design Cooperative. Working in shorts and sandals, getting paid to test bicycling gear and bikes and hearing customers' tales about bike trailers they've handed down through the family all add up to a fun and health-minded workplace, she says.

The best part, she says, is conducting meetings on bikes. When the cooperative's advertising trip with Kinman, Pa.-based bicycling magazine came to Eugene, for instance, Curry wanted his feedback on a bike, so they and four others went riding. At a February bicycling conference in San Diego, Curry and 29 others took a 16-mile ride every morning. "You can network and meet people," she says, from the founder of a similar line of bicycles to East Coast dealers.

Before starting at the employee-owned cooperative in February 2000, she did freelance employee communications marketing. At Burley, she started in market research, then moved to a manager position.

At least once a week, Curry rides the nine miles to work. As part of its alternative transportation program, her company gives employees \$1 per day in credit to buy bicycling gear. Employees hang their bikes in a large storage locker and use the company's shower facilities. "And helmet



Rorend Curry, far right, poses with Burley Design Cooperative co-workers after a 17-mile ride in Carmel, Calif.

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When work betters you, it's more than just a job

head is acceptable and sometimes preferred," Curry notes.

Likewise, Maggie Neilson, vice president of communications at Redmond, Wash.-based Unifun Inc., wanted to care more personally about her work. So the marketer who had worked at Microsoft, Calif.-based E. & J. Gallo Winery and Seattle-based Amazon.com Inc. sought a job with the microfinance accelerator in 2002. She'd read a business magazine article about microfinance and found it fascinating, "especially because it empowers women."

Unifun loans money only to women, who she says are statistically more reliable about repaying their loans. Neilson goes to India, Mexico and other places the loan organizations are located, in order to meet residents and get an idea of living conditions there, so she can more effectively market—and raise more money—for the loans in the States.

"I now have a job where I feel deeply about what happens every day. We're helping some of the poorest women in the world," she notes. Before, selling a company's image was "more of an intellectual challenge than a personally motivated one."

The average loan amount is \$100, an amount that can change a family's life forever, Neilson says. One Indian woman, who has been taking out a loan per year for five years, used her first loan to buy a buffalo. Its milk and other dairy products provided her with a steady income. When it produced a calf, she sold that. With a second loan, the woman bought a used moped and began collecting milk from all the other women who had bought buffaloes—becoming the middleman for the other buffalo owners. After that, she rented the front of a tea shop for her daughter,



Neilson considers her job the best marketing gig around.

who had become widowed and needed to support herself.

As a result, the daughter was able to send her son to school for the first time.

"Her family has been completely saved," Neilson says, "by probably a grand total of \$300 to \$400 in loans."

The fact that loans are virtually risk-free is a selling point, she says. While microfinance generally sees 95% repayment rates, all the organizations Unifun invests in have 100% flat repayment rates.

In the process of meeting and talking with individuals in other countries, Neilson says, she's realized that an assumption often made in the United States—that if a person's poor, they haven't worked hard enough or didn't go to school—isn't at all true. In India and Mexico she met poor people who worked hard, were smart and knew their businesses' full inventories, but still couldn't support their families. "So when you give them a loan, they're going to take advantage of it," she says. "And probably do more with it than you or I could."

The best job in marketing? Returning from a recent research trip, Neilson said to her husband, "I feel like this is making me a better person; I'm not just doing my job." ■

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the practice of file-sharing.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch

■ Efforts to distance the Martha Stewart empire from its embattled namesake, due to go on trial early next year, continue. The September issue of *Martha Stewart Living* saw the demise of the "Martha's Calendar" feature, which for 13 years encapsulated Stewart's positive monthly activities: throwing parties, planting flowers and planning carriage rides. The section has been replaced by "Gentele Reminders," which provides helpful hints and reminders and does not once mention Stewart, except to point readers to the company Web site. Stewart reportedly says the change was due to the fact that many other publications had begun to imitate it, and that it had lost its cache.

Customer is king

■ Eager to avoid legislation that would force them to abide by customer guidelines that could vary by state, cell phone service providers will voluntarily adopt policies that favor customer empowerment. In September, the nation's largest wireless carriers—Verizon Wireless, Cingular, Sprint PCS, Nextel and AT&T—and scores of regional companies agreed to follow a 10-part code of conduct intended to make it easier for customers to compare prices and plans.

Yo quiero that idea!

■ The talking Chihuahua has become a bone in the throat of the Taco Bell unit of Yum! Brands Inc. The Irvine, Calif.-based chain was ordered by a federal judge in September to pay an extra \$11.8 million in interest to two Michigan-based marketing professionals. The marketers, and their firm Wrench LLC, had accused Taco Bell of lifting the idea of a talking Chihuahua for an ad campaign without paying for it in a lawsuit

filed in January 1998. A jury in June ordered Taco Bell to pay \$30.1 million to the marketers, taking the total award in this five-year legal scuffle over creative ownership to \$41.9 million. Taco Bell, which has reportedly spent \$500 million on the Chihuahua national ad campaign, plans to appeal the decision.

Speaking of lawsuits

■ Nike Inc. in September elected to pay \$1.5 million to settle a case, rather than run the risk of seeing its press releases and other communications deemed ineligible for constitutional protection once and for all.

The long-running and hotly debated case dates back to 1998, when California activist Marc Kasky used the company claiming that statements made by the athletic-gear maker, based in Beaverton, Ore., about its Asian factory conditions were misleading and amounted to false advertising. Although two lower California courts dismissed the suit, the California Supreme Court ruled that Nike's press releases and other documents published to counter critics of overseas labor conditions were commercial speech, which receives lower First Amendment protection.

Nike appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, but, after listening to oral arguments, the Court sent the case back to California without deciding on the key issue of whether commercial speech deserves constitutional protection, as argued by Nike.

Under the settlement, the company will pay the Washington-based Fair Labor Association \$1.5 million without admitting wrongdoing. The funds will be used to encourage worker's education, increase training and develop a global reporting standard for factory work environments. ■

—Arundhati Parmar, Staff Writer

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