



The Raphel Report

**Observations on marketing,
advertising, sales and
promotions
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The Four Hundred

It was the 1890s and Mrs. Astor had a problem: how many to invite?

She and her wealthy financier husband just finished building their beautiful new home at 350 Fifth Avenue in New York City. She decided to have a party to show off her new home. Her huge art gallery was converted to a ballroom for the event.

In planning who to invite, she soon realized the room comfortably held only 400 people.

She solved the problem of how many by her decision to use the number 400. This would set the parameters for her selection of New York City's society. Her criteria was not only the wealth of each family but also whose lineage could be traced back at least three generations.

She sat at her writing desk, took pen in hand and began to selectively invite the cream of New York society to the most sought-after affair of the year. Word of the party soon traveled throughout the financial circles and eager families anxiously looked in their mailbox each day to see if they were among the chosen few – if, in fact, they were “a member of the 400.” (A higher number than Edith Wharton, author of “Ethan Frome” came up with. She said there were “only eight people in New York worth dining with.” *But I digress...*)

To this day, being “one of the 400” means you are selected as one who has made a distinctive mark for yourself worth belonging to this select group.

I decided there were only 400 people in my world!

Or your world.

You invite them to be part of your life. . . when needed.

I decided to begin listing my 400: individuals I knew, did business with, could call on short notice with a problem when I needed their help.

I started with an empty Rolodex and began listing names, addresses, telephone numbers, faxes, e-mails. The list included experts in different fields who I could quickly contact for a direction to take (or a reference to someone who would know... and the people referred to me were added to my list.)

Your list can include people who solved a business problem for you. Or the private number of the mechanic who repairs your air conditioner on a hot summer day. Maybe the person in charge of shipping your most important products from your supplier. Or your Representative in Congress (and, as important, his or her administrative aide).

I had a client who was going to Portland, Oregon. He asked me if I knew of any good restaurants there. I have a friend in the advertising business in Portland – one of my 400. I e-mailed him and he e-mailed me back with 3 must-see restaurants. The same day, I called my client and gave him the names. He was amazed at the speedy reply. Went to all three restaurants and, on his return, thanked me again.

I have a “400” member in marketing who moved from Sweden to the South of France. My son’s family went there on vacation. My “400” contact had our family as his guests for dinner and gave them a tour of the area.

My next-door neighbors were taking a trip to Ireland. One of their scheduled stops was Blarney Woolen Miles in Blarney, County Cork, for gifts. I had written a story for a marketing magazine about this family business. I e-mailed them, told them when my neighbors would arrive and asked a family member to give them a gift from me.

My neighbors were delighted! They were greeted as friends, given a private tour of the store and were surprised by the gift.

Other friends went to Hawaii. They like aquariums. I had met the aquarium director three years previously and put her name on my “400” list. I called and asked her to show my friends around. She did. They were amazed at this special attention and gave a donation to the aquarium. A win-win.

A month does not go by when this list is not used.

The list of 400 is ever changing. All you have to do is make everyone who makes the list meet the three K criteria: Knowledge, Know-how and Kinetics.

Kinetics is a branch of dynamics, creating forces that affect motion: People Who Know How To Get Things Done...NOW!

We noticed a prominent insurance agent listed not only his office number and address in the phone book but also his private home number so policyholders could contact him immediately in an emergency.

We switched our insurance agency to his the next day. We wanted someone we could immediately contact if there was ever an accident in our car, our home, anything...

The power of your 400 members is that they come up with a solution for your problem at once. They don’t ask, “When do you need it?”

The Greek poet Theognis described these select few in 500 BC. He wrote, “In a serious business a man’s companions are very few.”

Question: What happens if the list grows over 400?

Well, you could hire a bigger ballroom. But the easiest step is to continually review your current membership.

Flip through your “membership” cards and you'll come across someone you haven't heard from in a year or longer. Drop him or her a note saying, “Thinking of you. What's happening?” It's an alert check to see if that person is still responding. Most write back quickly and ask how are YOU doing? If the contact doesn't respond - off the list.

Point to remember: When you receive advice, directions, any help from one of your 400, write and say...”Thanks.”

There's a Chinese proverb that says it best: “When you're drinking the water, don't forget who dug the well.”