

Successful Singing Valentines

© 1998 SPEBSQSA, Inc.
6315 Third Avenue • Kenosha, WI 53143
800-876-SING • www.spebsqsa.org

Contents

Singing Valentines: a success story waiting to happen for you

- 1.1 Where do Singing Valentines come from?**
- 1.2 Everybody wins!**
- 1.3 Don't overlook cooperative ventures**
- 1.4 Valentines are *not* tax-deductible**
- 1.5 What to expect from the public**
- 1.6 How your customers will react**
 - 1.6.1 We deliver *love*, not songs
 - 1.6.2 Men delivering Singing Valentines to men
 - 1.6.3 On-site sales
- 1.7 What to expect from the chapter**

Creating the product

- 2.1 Creating the product mix**
 - 2.1.1 Quality = image: leave a good impression
- 2.2 Greeting cards**
 - 2.2.1 Purchasing cards
 - 2.2.2 Make your own cards
 - Card design tips
- 2.3 Floral and balloon bouquets**
 - 2.3.1 Partnerships with florists
- 2.4 Candies**
- 2.5 Permanent mementos**
- 2.6 Pricing and delivery options**

Promoting sales of Singing Valentines

- 3.1 Print advertising: flyers and order forms**
 - 3.1.1 Design an attractive print piece
 - Principles for copywriting and art
 - Order form
- 3.2 Newspaper, newsletter, and other paid advertising**
- 3.3 Media placements**
 - 3.3.1 Newspapers
 - 3.3.2 Partnerships with radio stations
 - 3.3.3 Television promotions
 - 3.3.4 Cable and community access bulletin boards

- 3.4 Advance appearances**
 - 3.4.1 Service clubs
 - 3.4.2 Other advance deliveries
- 3.5 Direct sales**
 - 3.5.1 Use that mailing list!
 - 3.5.2 Personal sales
 - 3.5.3 Direct mail
 - 3.5.4 Telephone sales

Take it to the streets: delivering Singing Valentines

- 4.1 Quartet training**
 - 4.1.1 Creating quartets and selecting repertoire
 - 4.1.2 How to present Singing Valentines
 - Stay focused, and sing from the heart
 - How many songs?
- 4.2 Booking and scheduling performances**
 - 4.2.1 Receiving advance orders
 - 4.2.2 Building the schedule
 - 4.2.3 Dispatching quartets
- 4.3 Collections and billing**
- 4.4 Administrative wind-up**

Appendix: Sample letters, ads, forms

- 5.1 News feature press release**
- 5.2 Advance news release for newspaper community calendar or radio public service announcement**
- 5.3 Thank you letter for Singing Valentines customers**
- 5.4 Sample Singing Valentines ad**

I Singing Valentines: a success story waiting to happen for you

I.1 Where do Singing Valentines come from?

No one knows for sure how long barbershop quartets have been delivering Singing Valentines. Perhaps the idea originated about the time when singing telegrams were popular. In both cases, the message was personalized far beyond what mere words on a card could convey.

In the late 1980s, the Santa Rosa, Calif., Chapter decided to prepare a manual for other chapters to use. After several years, the chapter gave printing and distribution rights of the manual to the Society. This manual is an outgrowth of those early efforts.

Singing Valentines have steadily increased in number as more and more Society chapters have discovered the concept to offer one of the most delightful, entertaining, enjoyable, and profitable ventures in barbershopping.

I.2 Everybody wins!

A chapter that sends out quartets to deliver Singing Valentines has an opportunity to present barbershop harmony, albeit briefly, in homes, stores, schools, offices, hospitals, restaurants and the like, where it may never have been heard before. And, it is always happily received.

The recipient is happy and those around her (sometimes him) are happy.

The quartet is happy for the warm reception it receives.

The treasurer is happy when the receipts start rolling in.

The press is happy to cover a great new angle on the Valentines story.

And we do it all by singing, which is what barbershop harmony organizations are all about.

While we refer to this idea as a Singing Valentines program, the concept is also effective on Mother's Day, Secretary's Day and other special occasions. The Singing Valentines program is a simple, effective way to:

- ▶ have fun barbershopping and quartetting,
- ▶ raise money while having fun,
- ▶ get your members performing in public in quartets
- ▶ and revitalize your chapter.

I.3 Don't overlook cooperative ventures

This manual should prove an effective guide, even if your chapter is not the only game in town. If there are other SPEBSQSA chapters, Sweet Adelines choruses, or Harmony, Inc. chapters in your community, why not explore a cooperative venture, rather than compete with one another for the same market? By combining resources and having a central clearing house, you'll make a more efficient use of personnel and make individual loads lighter.

If one or more of the other groups doesn't plan to run an actual campaign, invite their quartets to participate in yours, and work out a pro-rata share of the profits. This is one case where the phrase, "the more, the merrier," really works.

I.4 Valentines are *not* tax-deductible

Previous editions of the *Singing Valentines Manual* indicated that purchase of a Singing Valentine constitutes a contribution to a non-profit organization, and may be taken as a tax deduction by the patron. *This is absolutely incorrect.*

This manual is a starting point only for chapters that would like to try the Singing Valentines program for the first time. Many chapters have more sophisticated plans as a result of experience, and your chapter may choose to adapt its own plans from these ideas.

One thing is sure: you'll rarely find another event that meets with such community support, nor one that is more rewarding, financially and emotionally.

I.5 What to expect from the public

The Singing Valentines program is an excellent way to sell barbershop harmony to the general public in your local community. St. Valentine's Day (or Mother's Day) is a day of fond remembrances, a time for sharing a special thought with a spouse, parent or sweetheart. When you add the special attraction of a live quartet singing four-part harmony to songs that have lyrics of special love, the combination is practically unbeatable.

If you should ask practically anyone—friend or stranger— if they would like to order a Singing Valentine delivered by a barbershop quartet, carrying a bouquet of balloons or flowers and a customized Valentine's Day card, most people would readily say, "What a neat idea," or "That's great." The program has universal appeal—especially to people who are interested in sending a never-to-be-forgotten message to someone they love.

And that speaks in general for the reaction of the public when they hear about the plan. They simply love the idea, and it's one of the easiest programs to sell as a chapter.

If St. Valentine's Day falls on a work day, or if you are going to be making advance deliveries on a work day (recommended), you will find many business owners, managers, or supervisors who want to send a valentine to their collective staff, to a personal secretary, at a sales meeting and the like—the possibilities are endless. They see it as a unique and enjoyable way to reward people in their business organizations. And how right they are!

Commercial ventures aside, there are dozens of other opportunities to sell Singing Valentines to the general public. Patrons of your annual shows, members of civic or fraternal organizations, special interest clubs in your town—all are likely customers. Ask chapter quartets to supply you with names of contacts from their singouts and performances. Regardless of the size of your chapter, developing contacts and solid promotion will result in more sale.

I.6 How your customers will react

I.6.1 We deliver *love*, not songs

We have talked about what to expect from prospective "senders." Now, how can you expect the "recipients" to respond? They will love it. Some recipients might feel a little awkward, at first. But since the message is coming from a spouse or sweetheart, they are genuinely pleased and often deeply moved — whether the recipient is male or female. Smiles or tears of joy are the usual reactions. While some recipients will cherish the Valentine card and other mementos, what they will always *remember* is the quartet, singing songs with love-filled lyrics, with special fondness.

A vital part of the presentation is the surprise. Quartets tell stories about how the recipient glowed when first seeing the costumed quartet walk in the door. You will never have a more receptive, appreciative audience than the recipients when they become the focal point of the quartet's attention. A second audience will be the envious fellow-workers or family members and friends who are present when the Singing Valentine is delivered.

I.6.2 Men delivering Singing Valentines to men

Don't be concerned about gender. It really doesn't matter whether men sing to men or women sing to women. It's the thought that counts in the minds of recipients.

As a Singing Valentines performer, you are the sender's "ambassador of love" to the receiver. The performer must set aside his own awkwardness and focus on delivering the message with sensitivity, and without snickers or affectation. Singing Valentines, like any other performance, require that you sing *from the heart*.

I.6.3 On-site sales

Be prepared for "second generation" sales as the Valentines are delivered. A listener in the room, restaurant, or office will often remark that they would love to send a valentine of their own. The quartets should have a supply of contact information cards, and the like.

As the Singing Valentine Program has grown, a few rare instances have been reported wherein a Singing Valentine was ordered as a cruel joke. If, upon announcing that you are presenting a Singing Valentine from a named sender, the recipient seems genuinely upset or angry, do not force the issue. Apologize for the interruption, and withdraw quickly and discreetly.

I.7 What to expect from the chapter

The members of your chapter who deliver Singing Valentines can expect one of the most enjoyable experiences in barbershopping. Whether they are available for only a few hours in

an evening or all day, most members are ready to deliver more valentines when they return to your headquarters office after their last assignment.

Organizing the program, selling the valentines, and selecting and ordering supplies and gifts take time. The person taking the reins of this program needs to be well organized and especially skilled in delegation and follow-up. While planning for a successful Singing Valentines program might not be as involved as preparing for your annual show, it does require attention to detail and dedication.

In actuality, advance work can be an enjoyable part of the program. Advance selling is fun because this program is easy to sell and you can quickly see the rewards of your efforts. Advance promotion is fun because it can lead to extremely receptive audiences at service and civic clubs such as Rotary, Kiwanis, Optimists, Eagles and the like. Advance publicity is fun because outside organizations, including the media, take an interest in the uniqueness of the program.

Whether your program is successful and effective will depend in no small measure on your success in finding a chairman who can organize and delegate tasks meaningfully, then follow up to make sure deadlines are met. In addition, you must have the full support of your chapter's Board of Directors to assure that the program is presented to the entire chapter in such a positive manner that members will want to participate in each stage: organization, sales, and presentation.

Plan ahead and follow the plan.

2

Creating the product

The organizing committee should consist of a general chairman and a chairman for each of the following committees. In smaller chapters, it might be necessary for one man to assume more than one role, but it is imperative that each series of tasks be completed according to schedule. Don't overlook the value of appointing an assistant chairman to provide support and future leadership.

A sample organizational structure is divided among these six functions:

- ▶ **Supplies.** Determine and order the package that will be presented to each recipient. All supplies, especially those that can be ordered through wholesale outlets, must be ordered far enough in advance to get merchandise at the least cost. Last-minute orders add unnecessary expense and significantly reduce profits.
- ▶ **Publicity.** Design promotional materials (such as posters and flyers) to solicit sales. Later in the campaign, this committee may prepare and distribute publicity materials to newspapers and radio and television outlets.
- ▶ **Advance appearances.** Present brief programs several weeks before Valentine's Day to area service and civic clubs to promote sales.
- ▶ **Direct sales.** Organize the sales campaign and encourage personal sales by members of the chapter.
- ▶ **Quartet training.** Work with the chapter's quartet activity chairman to organize members to sing in interchangeable quartets.
- ▶ **Booking orders/scheduling performances.** This group will make it possible for your chapter to present the maximum number of valentines during the campaign.

The size of your project will determine the number of men and women your chapter needs to appoint to carry out each task. While most tasks can be completed by one or two people, there is always the problem of burning out committee chairmen and members. Appoint your committee people early, and get as many leaders involved as possible. It makes the program more fun and is less likely to place an overwhelming burden on only one or two members.

The general chairman and his organizing committee should meet early in the project and prepare an advance work schedule. The size of the project in your city will determine the number of committee or subcommittee meetings that might be needed. Many tasks will be completed outside the committee meetings, but every member should be in frequent contact with the chairman to apprise him of the flow of the work. What's more, there is a special synergy that can be gained by the unit working together.

With this organization in mind, let us examine each duty in greater detail.

2.1 Creating the product mix

The primary product is, of course, the *Singing Valentines experience*: four men appearing out of the blue to sing love songs for one special person. That is unquestionably the memorable, heart-warming part of the gift.

You may wish to enhance the experience, though, by adding other items to the product that help commemorate the day, and incidentally remind sender and recipient alike of the wonderful folks who made it possible: the barbershop chapter.

In addition to the music that is sung by the quartets, there are a number of optional gifts you may wish to include as a part of your package—an attractive high-quality valentine card, a bouquet of flowers or balloons, candies, and a permanent memento or souvenir. Some chapters provide quartets with Polaroid cameras in order to offer the recipient a photographic memento; others give away souvenir coffee mugs, key chains, and the like.

2.1.1 Quality = image: leave a good impression

The quality of your singing is important; do it well.

You wear tuxedos when you deliver Singing Valentines, because you want to leave an impression of class, elegance, style. Make sure the quality of the merchandise you include is equally elegant and graceful. It will represent you and your image for a long time to come.

It's possible to include your name, logo or contact info in these "leave behinds," without detracting from the emotional impact. Do it by making it small and inconspicuous.

Make sure all the memories of the Singing Valentines experience are happy and reflect well on barbershopping.

2.2 Greeting cards

2.2.1 Purchasing cards

While you can order your supply from a local stationery store or retail outlet listed in the Yellow Pages, the cost of purchasing greeting cards at retail prices will significantly reduce your overall profits.

It is possible to obtain cards directly from the publisher or wholesale company at a much lower cost. Publishers will work only with individuals or companies with wholesale permits, and often have large minimum-order requirements. This option might not be realistic for your chapter, but should be explored if one of your members has the appropriate license.

On the other hand, working through a wholesale *distributor* is often a viable source to reduce the costs of your project. They frequently have more flexible options for minimum orders and can offer a good selection of cards. You must order early from these distributors, since the publishing companies print and sell to their dealers months in advance of either Valentine's

Day or Mother's Day. As a rule of thumb, plan to order your cards at least four months prior to your promotion.

2.2.2 Make your own cards

The other option is to make the cards yourself. Again, be conscious of the fact that your image rides on the quality of product you leave behind. Home computers tempt many to exceed their own real design skills — but your customers can see the difference between a professional quality greeting card and a quick and dirty card churned out of a dot matrix printer.

That caution noted, there are several advantages to producing your own Singing Valentines cards:

- ▶ Cost can be significantly lower — approximately 20¢ each versus \$1 or more
- ▶ You can use custom art that matches other gift items
- ▶ You can include lyrics of the songs you sing (provided they are public domain songs such as "Let Me Call You Sweetheart" and "Story Of The Rose (Heart of My Heart)"). This makes a great memento of the experience.
- ▶ You can include contact info for your chapter

Contact a graphic designer, art student, or commercial printer that offers design services, and talk the project over. Spend money to get a good quality paper stock, dusty rose or soft pink, and matching gift envelopes.

Card design tips

- ▶ Keep it simple and sweet. One simple image is stronger than a jumble of mismatched images. White space helps.
- ▶ Use images, words and type that convey elegance, grace, emotions.
- ▶ Avoid too much calligraphic or script type — it can be hard to read. Stick with simple, elegant type in a various weights.
- ▶ Avoid cartoonish clip art. Woodcuts and charcoals and soft lines are more evocative
- ▶ Remember, the Singing Valentines card is about love between sender and the recipient, not about barbershop quartets; *you don't need a quartet on the card!*
- ▶ You may include contact info about the chapter, but make it small and inconspicuous.
- ▶ See the art samples in the appendix for more ideas.

2.3 Floral and balloon bouquets

In recent years, vinyl balloons have been used more and more frequently as bouquets for all occasions. You can purchase balloons from stationery stores, florists and party shops in any

shopping center. Some merchants, wishing to give your chapter a donation, or perhaps as an exchange for advertising, might offer to provide your balloons at wholesale prices. If you can make such arrangements, by all means, do so.

The same holds true for floral bouquets. One chapter found that a dozen long-stem roses cost about \$60 at Valentine's time; however, it located a wholesale outlet that had them for sale at \$6.45 per dozen. Either selection for your bouquet—floral or balloon—offers a colorful and festive addition to your overall package.

2.3.1 Partnerships with florists

Another approach is to outsource the job completely. Instead of getting into the Singing Valentines retailing business, become a vendor of Singing Valentines services to local florists. In addition to their usual fare of flowers, let the florist sell deliveries by quartets, process all the transactions, and earn a commission. Your quartets simply earn a fixed amount of money for every delivery.

This approach is particularly effective for small chapters or quartets operating independently, who do not wish the expense, work and risk of mounting a full-scale marketing campaign of their own.

2.4 Candies

What's more appropriate than "hugs" and "kisses?" Hershey's makes both, in chocolate and white chocolate. Can't be beat. Traditional Valentines candies are always a hit, too.

2.5 Permanent mementos

There are dozens of items that can be used as gifts: souvenir coffee cups, key rings, coin purses, desk accessories, calendars, pens and pencils, clocks, mini-flashlights, and so forth. Adding a permanent remembrance to your package makes a strong selling point, and repeat customers frequently mention the gifts received in past years.

The goal is to deliver a product that is handsome and likely to be used. *Quality is essential.* A coffee cup will become a fixture on someone's office desk everyday for the following year if it is of good quality and attractive art. The same gift will languish in a closet if it is poor quality, cartoonish, or not emotionally evocative.

As with custom greeting cards, look for opportunities to tie together all items under a similar graphic theme throughout: sales flyers, cards, mementoes, etc.

Many companies (see "advertising specialties" in the Yellow Pages) offer these mementoes for advertising and promotional purposes. Try to locate a specialty company and obtain a catalog, rather than purchase from a local shop at retail prices. The key is to select items early so they can be imprinted appropriately, and to select gifts appropriate for both men and women.

2.6 Pricing and delivery options

Having determined the individual items that go into the product mix, you need to hang a price tag on it.

Don't be afraid to charge what you're worth!

Seriously. Don't underprice yourself — you'll find there are always willing customers for the product. Many groups start at least \$25, but \$35 or \$40 as base price is perfectly appropriate.

An increasing number of chapters use a tiered pricing structure that connects the price to the window of opportunity for delivery. Because your quartets can't be everywhere at once, you can ease scheduling by charging a premium price for "on-time" deliveries and an attractive discount price for "anytime" deliveries.

Most patrons would prefer to order something more specific than "sometime on Valentine's Day" (or the day before, if you're doing that). Therefore, some chapters offer several options at varying prices.

The least expensive might be the morning or afternoon of a given day. Or, for a few dollars more, a slot within a three-hour "window" might be offered. At the next price level, a one-hour window could be offered. This gives the sender assurance that the recipient will be available to receive the gift, and most are willing to pay extra for that service. One chapter had no problem selling Singing Valentines, to be delivered at a *specific* time, at \$100 each.

The goal, of course, is to maximize your profitability while retaining as much schedule flexibility as possible. Typically, that will mean trying to move as many customers into the four-hour window category as possible. If the price of "on-time" is too low, you'll book too many that you can't fulfill on time; if the four-hour window is too expensive, you won't realize much more income from it, and will book primarily the lower-cost basic service.

Don't leave any money on the table: the effects of good pricing on gross sales			
	TOO CHEAP	BETTER	PREMIUM
Basic Price	\$25	\$30	\$35
Four hour window (+/- two hours of target)	\$35	\$40	\$45
Straight to the heart: delivered within 15 minutes of target	\$45	\$50	\$75
Potential gross (assuming 20/50/10 sales distribution)	\$2,000	\$2,300	\$2,800

So, again: *don't underprice Singing Valentines*. The service is valuable, unique, and well worth every cent you charge for it.

3

Promoting sales of Singing Valentines

Spreading the word of your unique gift involves several stages during the overall campaign.

- ▶ Print promotion
- ▶ Media placements
- ▶ Direct sales
- ▶ Advance appearances

3.1 Print advertising: flyers and order forms

3.1.1 Design an attractive print piece

Your print piece should be versatile and attractive enough that you can use it for direct mail, bulletin boards, churches, supermarkets, handouts, etc.

Again, the image and elegance of your print advertising needs to reflect the quality of your Singing Valentines product.

Principles for copywriting and art:

- ▶ The primary message is "Send a unique gift that will leave your sweetheart speechless." Give an unforgettable gift. The target is the *emotional impact* of a Singing Valentine.
- ▶ Singing Valentines make great last-minute orders — we cater to the *desperate*.
- ▶ Ordering is easy, thanks to your chapter phone number, credit card acceptance (see "Taking Orders") and same-day service
- ▶ You are selling LOVE, not barbershop quartets. Use love and music imagery, not quartet imagery.
- ▶ Use images, words and type that convey elegance, grace, emotions.
- ▶ If you are affiliated with a radio station, florist, etc., use their logos to leverage their name recognition and reputation. ("If KVIL is behind this, it must be really good!")
- ▶ One simple image is stronger than a jumble of mismatched images. White space helps.
- ▶ Avoid too much calligraphic or script type — it can be hard to read. Stick with simple, elegant type in a various weights.
- ▶ Avoid cartoonish clip art. Woodcuts and charcoals and soft lines are more evocative

Order form

- ▶ Sender's name/address/phone — be sure to add these to your chapter mailing list for future shows and Singing Valentines
- ▶ Payment info, including expiration date of credit card and name as it appears on the credit card. (Some banks can be sticky about this.)
- ▶ Recipient's name and address for delivery, time
- ▶ Special delivery instructions, messages to be written on card.

3.2 Newspaper, newsletter, and other paid advertising

Direct advertising in newspapers is an expensive way to sell Singing Valentines, and may not provide a sufficient return to justify the costs involved.

Check the costs of weekly shoppers, community papers, government agency newsletters, corporate in house publications, church bulletins, school bulletins, and librettos/programs for musical and theatrical events in your community. there are lot of ways to skin a cat— explore more of them.

3.3 Media placements

Singing Valentines make a great feature story in themselves, or a part of a story on "unique ways to celebrate Valentine' Day." The key is to *tell a story*, not beg for "free advertising." (If you want advertising, pay for advertising; if you want a story, tell a story.)

3.3.1 Newspapers

Make contact several weeks in advance and request that the feature writer send a photographer to a home or business while a quartet "stages" a delivery, to be published prior to Valentine's Day. Even with large-market newspapers, if you can get your event covered as a feature column or story, it will be far more successful than any advertising you develop.

Most newspapers, regardless of size, have a community calendar section in which events are listed as a public service at no charge. This too is an effectiveway to get the word to the public about the program, and your only cost is postage. The sample press release in the Appendix is the appropriate length a newspaper's community calendar section.)

3.3.2 Partnerships with radio stations

Radio is perhaps the best medium for promoting Singing Valentines, because it provides sufficient time to tell the story several times over, it gives the potential customer a chance to sample the product with his own ears, and the radio stations themselves just can't get enough of them.

Almost any radio format works for this, too: country, adult contemporary, talk and oldies stations are great, but urban and rock stations get a kick out of it, too. Don't limit your thinking on this: you'll be surprised how popular this program is.

Contact the sales manager, program director, or morning drive time air talent and offer a unique proposition: you will put a quartet at their disposal for Valentine's Day, in exchange for some on-air promotion.

The radio station can use the quartet anywhere they like: in the studio, on location, as a sponsorship for an advertiser, as a thank you to their best customers, whatever they wish.

The morning drive show should include a contest for several days up to and including Valentine's Day:

"Call us or fax us with reasons your sweetheart deserves a Singing Valentine."

Radio shows thrive on listener participation like this, and the air talent can make themselves heroes by helping out people with last-minute orders.

Use a good quartet from your chapter for a live on-air appearance and as the "quartet of the day" for the station. Provide a compact disc with "Let Me Call You Sweetheart" and "Story of the Rose (Heart of My Heart)" for producing promos for other dayparts.

Give out that phone number over and over, and listen to that phone RING!

3.3.3 Television promotions

Television stations are an ideal medium to publicize your Singing Valentines. If possible, get on a locally produced variety or magazine show, or the early-morning news shows. Again, the important part of the story is "Great last-minute gift ideas for Valentine's Day."

One chapter used the ploy of calling the *executive assistant* (who is almost always a woman) at each of the TV stations in the area a day or so in advance of Valentine's Day, stating up front who they were and what chapter they represented, and said they wanted to present her (or someone else of her choice at the station) with a Singing Valentine. This invariably resulted in air time in one form or another.

Of course, if you do get on TV, concentrate on your performance. This includes costuming and make-up. Television studio lighting is different from stage lighting, and the makeup requirements are equally different. Work with the show's producer in advance to assure you will look your best. When singing, every performer must sing directly into the camera in order to be singing to the audience. And finally, facial expressions are even more critical to the television camera than on stage.

Be prepared with lots of material. Although the initial invitation may be to sing a song for the Singing Valentines segment, quartets are often asked to provide "bumper" music to go in and out of commercial breaks. Rehearse a number of other love songs for these purposes.

Set the station's call letters or slogan to a tag you know, and offer to sing that. It's irresistible for the producer to hear a musical rendition of "A friend you can count on— Channel 6."

3.3.4 Cable and community access bulletin boards

Many community cable companies offer limited local programming, or more frequently, moving bulletin boards. Although often overlooked, local bulletin boards can be particularly

effective if your message is carried ten days to two weeks before Valentine's Day or Mother's Day.

3.4 Advance appearances

3.4.1 Service clubs

One of the best publicity ideas is to have a quartet make an appearance for 10 to 15 minutes before service clubs and other organizations during the two weeks prior to Valentine's Day. The program is simple: the quartet sings one or two numbers, one of the members describe the Singing Valentines program and how much recipients enjoy getting a singing message, advises club members how to place orders, and the quartet sings a final song before leaving.

Large service clubs, such as Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions, Optimists, Business and Professional Women, receive many requests from people and causes that want to make announcements or conduct programs. They don't have a lot of extra time, and especially do not want to be "used." All of this makes it extremely important that you contact the program chair or club president early. Six to eight weeks in advance is not too early.

The Chamber of Commerce in your community should be able to provide you with a list of all service clubs and other community organizations. This list generally includes information about when and where they meet, along with the current officers' names and telephone numbers.

While service clubs that meet at noon are particularly good, don't overlook any organization that would welcome a quartet for a brief appearance during the first two weeks of February. Some of the warmest receptions—and dozens of orders as well—come from presentations before women's clubs and organizations. Selling to these organizations is particularly easy because members can complete their orders without spouses or sweethearts being around to find out.

Work closely with the club's program chair when you prepare for your presentation. Most club meetings are on a tight schedule because members have to return to work or meet other commitments. Respect the time restraints you are given and complete your pitch accordingly, then let them know you will set up a table in the lobby where you can meet with members after the meeting to distribute flyers and take orders.

3.4.2 Other advance deliveries

If you are prepared, you will have a number of opportunities to deliver Singing Valentines before Valentine's Day. It is a good way to increase sales without incrementally increasing the amount of preparation. And, one successful presentation generates additional sales. If you offer presentations prior to Valentine's Day, observers will recognize a good idea when they see it and place orders on the spot.

Chapters are frequently asked to present a valentine for a sales meeting during the week preceding Valentine's Day. They also go early to schools, restaurants, businesses, and homes when, for one reason or another, delivery was not convenient on Valentine's Day. If you have a quartet or two with men free to sing during the day, you will be able to accept dozens of opportunities for making advance deliveries.

3.5 Direct sales

3.5.1 Use that mailing list!

A large part of your customer base for Singing Valentines will come from people who already know and love barbershop harmony—your show patrons— and the easiest way to reach them is direct mail. A few things you can do:

- ▶ Consider combining ticket sales for a spring show with Singing Valentines for a discounted price.
- ▶ Enroll your show patrons as salespeople. Offer free show tickets to any patrons who sell Singing Valentines for you.

3.5.2 Personal sales

Barbershoppers love to sing, but don't always seem to have an equal enthusiasm for selling. Have your general chairman take few minutes during a January meeting to distribute writing materials, and ask each member to list the name of anyone they think might buy a valentine: neighbors, merchants, business owners, shopkeepers, golfing partners, bowling team members and the like.

Give each chapter member a generous supply of flyers and ask him to contact each person he included on his list. Then follow up, if they don't get an immediate order, by mailing a flyer to, or calling, the people named on the lists. The telephone book will give you the addresses and/or phone numbers for most of the names that were submitted.

3.5.3 Direct mail

Even if you have a very effective show patrons list, you may sell fewer valentines from this list than expected. Another is to mail the flyer to professionals—both men and women—at their offices. Using listings from the Yellow Pages, mail flyers to professionals in medicine, accounting, finance, law, real estate, stocks and bonds, insurance and the like.

While the intent is to get orders from individuals, if the flyer gets to the professional without being opened by clerical staff, the chances are you'll get an order to present a valentine to the office. For that reason, mail flyers in standard business envelopes to these offices, and ask members to assist in hand-addressing them. Distribute copies of the Yellow Pages to those members and ask that, during the week between chapter meetings, they address, stuff and seal the envelopes, and bring them back to chapter the next week. Even if the chapter doesn't have a nonprofit mailing permit, you'll probably receive enough returned orders to be worthwhile.

Another good way to utilize flyers is through bulletin boards in supermarkets and malls. Ask your members to take note of locations throughout the year. Many bulletin boards may be used without restriction, but some require permission from the management before posting. Assign members to monitor specific locations after initial posting, because your flyer in this case should include tear-off strips for potential patrons to take with them. This is much more effective and convenient than expecting readers to remember the ordering information or take their own notes.

Be sure to offer free Singing Valentines to selected media, community leaders, musicians on your PR contacts list, too. These are people you want to thank for their help in the past, and cultivate as friends for the future.

3.5.4 Telephone sales

Despite adverse reactions some consumers have to telephone solicitation, you can easily sell orders by "cold calling." As with the flyers, try to reach professionals, executive-level managers, or business owners and operators, using the Yellow Pages or directories provided by your local Chamber of Commerce.

When you call, you have several immediate objectives. In the first few seconds of the call, you should convey you are not a telemarketer, that you are a local resident (and possible client or customer), and that the service you are offering is something unique and special for his staff, wife, secretary, special customer or good friend. Have your best minds prepare a sales script that can be presented briefly, naturally and comfortably.

If the call does not result in an immediate order, ask if you can send a flyer in the mail for review at a more convenient time. Then arrange to call back in a few days to provide an opportunity for him or her to place an order at that time.

On telephone solicitation orders, use a telephone order form to get complete delivery information. Let the sender know the scheduling committee will be calling to confirm time arrangements for delivering the Singing Valentine. Finally, get complete billing information, whether by credit card or check. If payment is by check, send a confirmation letter when the check arrives.

4

Take it to the streets: delivering Singing Valentines

You've created the product and promoted it. Now, you have to actually *deliver*. This phase consists of three phases:

- ▶ Training and preparing the quartets
- ▶ Taking orders and scheduling deliveries
- ▶ D-Day (V-Day?): Making the deliveries

4.1 Quartet training

4.1.1 Creating quartets and selecting repertoire

Your organized quartets that who perform regularly may have special costumes and an extensive repertoire, but if they choose to participate in the Singing Valentines program, we suggest that they brush up on the few simple ballads that the rest of the members will use. Aim to keep the performances as uniform as possible, both to provide a consistent product, but also to allow for interchanging singers in quartets

For the rest of your singers, one of the most enjoyable parts of this entire campaign is getting the make-up quartets ready for their performances. Begin this process eight weeks before Valentine's Day or Mother's Day by distributing music to the entire chapter to review and learn. Then, each week thereafter, devote several minutes to rehearsing the songs as a full chorus before letting the men break into quartet combinations. They may wish to sing with the same personnel in presenting Singing Valentines, or some may volunteer to fill in wherever needed as individual schedules may require.

Encourage all chapter member to sing in quartets, and most will do so enthusiastically. Recruit the few who choose not to sing for administrative tasks, and while the quartets are rehearsing each week, have them meet in a separate room to finalize scheduling.

It is important to assure that each quartet performs at an acceptable level before being sent out to deliver Singing Valentines. The keys to this are selecting good, singable arrangements and providing sufficient time for rehearsal. You will find that once the men learn the notes and words accurately, and have a few weeks to work together, you can take almost any combination in the chapter and create a quartet that performs at an acceptable level.

The typical repertoire consists of:

- ▶ "I Love You Truly"
- ▶ "Heart of My Heart" (Story of The Rose)
- ▶ "Let Me Call You Sweetheart"

- ▶ “Sweet and Lovely”
- ▶ "All That I Ask Is Love"

For Mother’s Day:

- ▶ “The Hand That Rocked My Cradle Rules My Heart"
- ▶ “That Wonderful Mother of Mine"

4.1.2 How to present Singing Valentines

Stay focused, and sing from the heart

It is important to remember that the purpose is to deliver a sentimental message from one person to another. This is not the time to promote the chapter show or other events.

Keep the presentation brief. Do not introduce yourselves in any way. Your quartet name, your individual names, parts sung, chapter name, and the like are not important to the occasion.

Decide which quartet member will be the spokesman. When you locate the recipient, simply say, “Happy Valentines Day, [name], we’re here to deliver a Singing Valentine to you from [name].” Blow the pitch and sing. Hand over the card and other gifts, (take a Polaroid photo and present it) take a bow and depart.

How many songs?

A single song is recommended for three reasons. First, one song is all that is necessary to convey the special moment. Second, you are interrupting whatever the recipient might be doing at the time, and it would not be courteous to prolong the interruption. Third, you may need time to honor special requests.

If you are requested to sing an encore, by all means accommodate the request, unless your timetable precludes it. You will frequently find that, having delivered a valentine to an individual in a workplace, you may be asked to sing for a group of co-workers.

You may also find yourselves buttonholed by one or more people who wish to order a Singing Valentine themselves, or who have questions about your quartet, your chapter or the Society. Be prepared with a supply of business cards (quartet, chapter or other) and the number for Singing Valentines HQ. This may be an opportunity to mention your annual show or other upcoming event. If promotional material is currently available, try to have that handy, which is particularly advantageous if you happen to be contacted by media personnel during your deliveries.

If the recipient is not available at the scheduled time, call Singing Valentines HQ immediately to notify the sender and perhaps reschedule, if at all possible.

4.2 Booking and scheduling performances

4.2.1 Receiving advance orders

Handling orders as they are received is critical to a successful event. They must be scheduled and matched to your capacity to deliver, so your quartets remain busy with minimal dead time occurs. Schedule performances in a solid block to make the most efficient use of personnel.

People who have ordered Singing Valentines anticipate the quartet's arrival with keen interest, and many go to considerable effort to arrange their schedules to attend the performance. Done well, dispatching and coordinating quartet performances will be easy and smooth, leaving senders, recipients, performers, and committee members anticipating next year's opportunity.

From the time you release your first publicity, you *must* have someone to receive and administer phone and mail orders. Call forwarding and voice mail services from the telephone company help spread the work around and provide full-time coverage.

If you choose to offer tiered pricing (see "Creating the Product Mix") for on-time delivering, it's even more important to begin scheduling right from the start.

4.2.2 Building the schedule

- ▶ Determine the number of quartets you will have performing during each period of the day. If you have two or three that can sing from 9 a. m. to noon, an additional two that can sing in the afternoon, and six that can sing at night, you know your capacity.

In booking and scheduling, simply count the number of quartets *available to sing* during specific periods of the day; you need not be concerned whether the quartet changes personnel during that time slot.

- ▶ Analyze your city, paying particular attention to natural neighborhoods and section lines. Divide the city into logical areas. Your objective is to assign a quartet to do all of its singing within a certain sector of your city to minimize its travel time.

In general, a quartet can do three, sometimes four, performances per hour without being rushed or under-utilized.

- ▶ There are as many schemes for tracking schedules as there are chapters that hold Singing Valentines campaigns, but whether you use a computer spreadsheet or a pencil and paper, don't overbook! Look for ways to maximize flexibility.
- ▶ If at all possible, arrange for each quartet to have a chauffeur. This offers several advantages, not the least being a chance for the foursome to relax between performances. If deliveries are scheduled at workplaces where parking is a problem, the driver can drop them at the entrance, find a spot to watch from, and pick them up after the gig. This is especially advantageous if the weather is bad, as February often can be.
- ▶ On-the-fly communications between the quartets and Singing Valentines HQ can add immeasurably to your flexibility. Many chapters have found that the local cellular phone outlet will donate equipment and air time in exchange for a free valentine delivered to its staff, or for some advertising exposure. Here again, a chauffeur can play a vital role—the quartet can't be expected to answer a call or page in mid-song.

If mobile communications can't be arranged, have each quartet call in from a pay phone periodically to check for any schedule adjustments, and to keep HQ apprised of its status. As the delivery day progresses, additional orders will come flooding in.

4.2.3 Dispatching quartets

Make certain everyone knows the plan and his part in it. Provide complete information and directions a day or two before Valentine's Day so that everyone has his copy of the final plans.

Determine a headquarters location for gathering, warming up, getting orders, having a cup of coffee, taking same-day orders and dispatching. You can use the chapter's regular meeting hall for this purpose, but any convenient location with at least one telephone and extra room will do.

As each quartet comes in, give it a packet with all the details they need for their performances. The packet should include:

- ▶ **A map.** Even though the order blanks should give clear directions to the performance site, have a map handy to eliminate unnecessary confusion. If your city is rather large, they need only a map of their sector.

- ▶ A one-page schedule showing the time periods this particular quartet will be performing and the sectors where it will perform. For example,

Quartet Able	
9:00 a.m. to noon	East of Shopping Center
3:30 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.	Northeast
5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.	North of Freeway

It's best not to use members' names on this schedule, as personnel may change as the day progresses. Regardless of personnel, this will be Quartet Able all day long .

- ▶ **An assignment sheet** for each chapter member assigned to that quartet and his voice part. For example, if Larry is singing lead with Quartet Baker in the morning and tenor with Quartet Charlie in the evening, that information should be included in the information packet for both Quartet Baker and Quartet Charlie. That way, there will be no last-minute questions about personnel.
- ▶ An information sheet for all members of the chapter that shows headquarters address, telephone number and directions to it. You must anticipate and be prepared for some problems; that's why a central headquarters is vital.
- ▶ Orders for singing, including names, addresses, and telephone numbers of senders as well as recipients, along with clear directions on time and location for presenting the valentine. The dispatcher/scheduler is responsible for determining the most efficient sequence for delivering these Singing Valentines, based on time and location. The orders should be placed in the packet in the order in which they are to be sung.
- ▶ Every chapter member who is going to sing, drive, or help at headquarters should be given the headquarters phone number to carry in his wallet during the last chapter meeting before Valentine's Day. If they are delayed, or other problems come up, they will be able to notify the chairperson or someone on the planning committee of the delay and when they can be expected.

- ▶□ Every member should check in physically at headquarters before going into the field with a quartet. He may need to take supplies, or there might have been a change in performance order, or any of a myriad of changes that crop up as the day progresses. On the plus side, if the quartet is running ahead, or has a gap in its programming, headquarters might be able to send out some extra orders and supplies to be added to the schedule.

It is a very good idea that a few reserve men be kept at headquarters. These men can be worked in as performers if needed, sent to meet quartets with additional supplies, or handle other emergencies that come up. Better to have a couple of men in reserve than to run short and disappoint people.

4.3 Collections and billing

A Singing Valentine is what merchants call a *time-dated product*. It has a great deal of value on Valentine's Day but, like old Easter eggs and Fourth of July firecrackers, the next morning you can't give one away.

Some people will call in an order and promise to mail a check "today." Often, but not always, they find it easy to put off making their payment until it is forgotten entirely.

Once you have delivered the Singing Valentine, your bargaining power is gone, but when you are booking the order, you still have complete control. You should adopt a firm policy of not booking a delivery unless you have a check in hand or are given full and complete credit card information to send the charges through the day after Valentine's Day.

You may have some success with customers who agree to have the check at the performance, and inform the quartet specifically who to see to pick up the check. However, there can still be instances when this is a nuisance. The pre-payment policy works best.

For credit card orders, you may find a local merchant who will agree to process the orders through his business. This may involve an agreement for some kind of payment, since the merchant will be billed for a percentage of the credit card receipts. Another possibility is to offer a free Singing Valentine to him or a favored customer.

If a member of your chapter has a retail business with credit card billing already established and is willing to let you run the orders through his business, it will be easier on you to keep this process "in house." But most local merchants are cooperative and quite willing to help.

SPEBSQSA chapters may also take advantage of a program that helps them establish their own credit card merchant accounts. Contact the Department of Finance & Administration at Harmony Hall for details.

Preparing credit card slips can be done any time, but date the transaction February 14. You can process the slips on the next business day. On the charge slip, describe the merchandise as "SPEBSQSA Singing Valentine," and on the line for the cardholder's signature, write "Signature on file," which the banks accept.

If you adhere to your prepayment policy, it means you do not accept a telephone order with the promise of receiving a check. Tell the caller you will wait until the check is received to complete their order and book the performance. Or, agree to take credit card information for booking purposes at the time of the call and use the purchaser's check instead of the credit card if the check is received before Valentine's Day.

4.4 Administrative wind-up

With a major activity like Singing Valentines, the project really isn't finished until a lot of people have been thanked and the administrative details taken care of.

First of all, the members and families who sang and helped should be thanked appropriately. An afterglow-type party can be a great success. The entire team, and especially the performers, are usually still so enthused and their spirits so high, they simply won't want to quit and go home. There will be many stories and anecdotes to share, and you may "reprise the day" well into the night.

You should contact every "sender" with a brief thank-you letter acknowledging their patronage. This serves two vital purposes: It promotes repeat business, and is the ideal place to make good on any promises of free advertising made in exchange for donated or cut-rate goods and services.

As a footnote to the letter, list your supporters, such as, "Cellular phones courtesy of Acme Communications," and "Flowers/balloons by Joseph's Florists." For customers who paid with credit cards, include the customer copy carbon in their letters.

Send similar thank-you letters to every radio and television station and to the other individuals or organizations in the community that helped promote the event. To do so is not only appropriate, but also paves the way for their continued support in future endeavors.

Be sure that the names and addresses of all senders and recipients are given to your annual show committee to be included on your patron mailing list. One exciting and enjoyable experience with barbershop harmony might encourage them to attend other events.

5

Appendix: Sample letters, ads, forms

5.1 News feature press release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: February 5, 1997
For further information, contact: Brian Lynch, 414-653-8554

SINGING VALENTINES WILL KEEP MILWAUKEE SINGING ON FEB 14TH

They'll be saying "I love you" in song next week-- and they'll be leaving hundreds of lucky romantics speechless.

On Friday, February 14, a dozen barbershop quartets will fan out across the Milwaukee metro area to deliver Singing Valentines to hundreds of special sweethearts. The sound of harmony will ring out in offices, restaurants, schools and homes throughout Wisconsin. Wherever they appear, they'll draw a crowd -- and sometimes a few tears.

The quartets belong to local chapters of the 34,000-member Society for the Preservation and Encouragement of Barber Shop Quartet Singing in America, Inc. (SPEBSQSA), which is headquartered in Kenosha.

A typical Singing Valentine costs around \$35 and includes two songs sung in barbershop harmony, a card, a rose and perhaps a box of chocolates. Men and women alike are on the receiving end -- with moving results.

"It's especially fun to deliver a Singing Valentine from a woman to her husband or boyfriend," says Brian Lynch, of the Festival City Chorus. "Last year, my quartet went to a meat-packing plant here in Milwaukee, and caught a guy going off-shift. He was stunned. His co-workers gathered around, and were ready to start razzing him -- until they saw the tears welling up in his eyes."

To order a Singing Valentine, contact the Festival City Chorus at 414-281-SING or the Midwest Vocal Express at 414-273-9683.

For orders in any of 250 cities outside the Milwaukee metro area, call SPEBSQSA's National Singing Valentines Clearinghouse at (800) 876-SING and ask for a Singing Valentine. Or, visit the Harmony Hall Home Page on the World Wide Web at <http://www.spebsqsa.org/> to search by state.

5.2 Advance news release for newspaper community calendar or radio public service announcement

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: February 5, 1997
For further information, contact: Brian Lynch, 414-653-8554

(CHAPTER/CHORUS) WILL DELIVER SINGING VALENTINES

Valentine's Day can be made even more special for your loved ones this year with a Singing Valentine delivered by a Barbershop Quartet. Members of the (chapter/chorus) will deliver Singing Valentines for area residents and business people looking for a fun and exciting new way to send a Valentine message to their sweethearts, special clients or customers.

The (chapter/chorus) is affiliated with the Society for the Preservation and Encouragement of Barber Shop Quartet Singing in America, an international organization dedicated to foster this truly American form of music.

For more information or to place an order for a Singing Valentine, call (123-4567).

*Kill date: February 12

5.3 Thank you letter for Singing Valentines customers

Sender
1234 Streetname Drive
Your City, State 12345

Dear Sender:

Thank you for your recent order of a Singing Valentine from the (chapter name) of the Barbershop Harmony Society.

We are grateful for your support of our program and trust our quartet made the day very special for the one who received your thoughtful gift.

Thank you, once again, for your order.

Larry DeLead
Singing Valentine Program Chairman

P.S. Cellular phone service provided by X-Communication, flowers from the Enchanted Florist and candy from Ain't She Sweets.



Say "I Love You" WITH A SONG!!



*Presented by the Music City Chorus
of Nashville, TN*






Starting at
\$50*

**Multiple Delivery Options Available*

Singing Valentine Includes:

A Valentine's Serenade with...

-  *A Quartet Singing 2 Songs,*
-  *A Box of Candy,*
-  *A Red Rose*

ORDER YOURS TODAY!

*Deliveries will be on
Saturday 12th - Monday 14th*

Singing Valentines
615-469-4555
or 615-604-3682

Singing Valentines
615-469-4555
or 615-604-3682

Singing Valentines
615-469-4555
or 615-604-3682

Singing Valentines
615-469-4555
or 615-604-3682

Singing Valentines
615-469-4555
or 615-604-3682

Singing Valentines
615-469-4555
or 615-604-3682

Singing Valentines
615-469-4555
or 615-604-3682

Singing Valentines
615-469-4555
or 615-604-3682

Singing Valentines
615-469-4555
or 615-604-3682