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BREAKING NEWS

Small, Independent RV Firms Form Alliance

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RV Business

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A group of small companies associated with the RV industry have formed an advertising and marketing alliance to attract consumers with a free Internet lottery that will offer RV-related prizes donated by members.

The Circle of Trust RV Family also will attempt to provide a guarantee to RVers that member companies provide quality products and a high level of customer service.

"We are in the very early stages, but this is going to be an association, more or less, that will offer a way for independent RV companies to have a way to advertise and promote themselves in a low-cost fashion," said co-founder Mark Polk, Fayetteville, N.C., president of RV Education 101, a company that produces instructional videos for RVers.

Other founding members include Happy Camper Club Inc., a discount camper club with headquarters in Monroe, La., and All Merchant Services, a web-design firm located in Naples, N.Y.

The group will operate two websites – rvlotto.com, where a weekly lottery will be conducted based on the numbers drawn in the New York State Lottery, and circleoftrustrvfamily.org, which contains links to sponsor-members.

Ads for companies that provide prizes for the lottery will cycle through the website when consumers visit to play tickets. The second weekly lottery drew about 680 participants and awarded 19 prizes in various categories, Polk said.

By entering, participants agree to receive an e-mail magazine the group intends to publish, which will contain ads from member companies.

"We are hoping to get 50,000 subscribers in a reasonable amount of time," Polk said.

Early members include Canine Companion, a company that sells medical travel kits for pets; theoutdoorstores.com, a Dallas-based Internet seller of outdoor clothing and equipment; and the book "Road Trip Dream," by Phil and Carol White, which gives advice to RVers on taking their dream RV trip.

"A lot of these are very small companies," Polk said, "but that's who we created this for."

Participating companies are self-nominated, and must be approved by the three founding members. Two applicants already have been turned down, Polk said.

"We are trying to exclude anyone who has had problems with customer service in the past," Polk said. "We want to be careful not to include them because we want to be able to tell consumers that they can trust these people and feel good about the purchase they are about to make."

Membership is free, and the group intends eventually to make money from advertising in the newsletter.

Polk said the group has been careful to set the lottery up so that it is legal. "We know that the word `Lotto' sort of brings up a red flag, but we want people to know that it is absolutely 100% legitimate. There is no catch.

"We are in compliance with all the laws. There is no money changing hand. The only thing people agree to is getting our e-mail magazine where we announce the winning numbers. It's sort of like an opt-in newsletter."