

Marketing & Promotions

Most sports have an interest in increasing their membership. More members or supporters bring in more funds which enable the sport to develop through better facilities, enhanced opportunities for competition and more effective administration.

Gaining new members is no easy task because of the large number of sports that are now competing for support at all levels. Even retaining existing members can be a challenge in this competitive climate.

Publicity and promotion of a sport is becoming increasingly important, not only to move forward but also to avoid slipping backwards. Many sports participants and spectators regularly switch their allegiance from sport to sport, and such turnover is not likely to be prevented by marketing. The loss of former supporters is inevitable, but can be offset by attracting new supporters. To do so, however, requires constant attention to promotion.

Crucial to your publicity program is picking the right target group or persons and aiming what you do at them. When aiming at a target group, you must work out what will interest them. Be aware of what is important to each group and tailor your appeal to that. Parents of young children, for example, are very concerned with safety, fun, and appropriate times and levels of competition, so stress these.

Remember: Promotion is only as effective as the effort put into its preparation!

Marketing

What is marketing?

When you mention marketing to many people, they instantly think of activities such as advertising, flyers, brochures and direct mail. However, it encompasses much more than this and many of the things that you're already doing could be classed as marketing.

Are you aware of how people are treated when they enquire about joining your centre, or whether new members are made to feel welcome? If you are, then you are currently undertaking what is called 'informal marketing' and this is vital for the sustainability of your centre.

Formal marketing consists of what is called the marketing mix and is most commonly represented through elements that relate to product, price, place and promotion. The first three of these focus on whether your product or service fits the needs of your existing and potential members. Promotion relates to how you communicate and publicise what you have to offer.

Why use marketing?

In order to survive and grow in an increasingly competitive market, centres must find ways of attracting new members while retaining existing ones.

Through marketing you can achieve this, while it also helps you:

- Identify opportunities for growth and long- term sustainability;
- Clearly communicate and raise awareness of exactly what your centre has to offer;
- Become more visible within the community;
- Increase sponsorship and engage local businesses;

- Recruit volunteers.

Who does marketing?

Everyone in your centre should be involved in informal marketing whenever they can. Encourage your members to tell their friends and family about what you do and what your centre can offer. For the formal marketing side of things, it's particularly useful to appoint a marketing or promotions officer, to oversee the development and implementation of your centre's marketing strategies.

Marketing Your Centre

Understand what people want

People don't like being told what to do and when to do it. Marketing is about looking at your centre from the point of view of the individual, and learning to understand what he/she wants from it and how these needs can be met. Think about what barriers there are for people joining a sporting club. Is it lack of time, the cost of membership or the fact that people consider alternative activities more fun?

Make your centre fun, easy and popular

Activities that involve spending time with friends and family are very appealing to people. Emphasise the social side of the centre and how much fun it can be. Most people accept that playing sport is a lot more fun when it's sociable, and because of this, more people are likely to take part.

Use a mix of marketing tools

Keep it simple and utilise the full range of tools that are available, from using the media to being involved in community events. When promoting your centre, it is important to use images that people can relate to, so they feel included from the start.

And finally, don't forget to make the most of the technology that is available. Your website and email campaigns are effective, low cost and immediate ways of communicating to existing and potential members.

Know your centres values

Your centres values or 'personality' are the things that will attract people (or put them off) joining your centre. A centre should include values such as fun, safe, social and professional. These values need to be expressed in everything your centre does, from writing letters to how a coach interacts with the athletes.

Identify your centres unique selling points

Think about the quality of your service and ways that you can improve it. What feedback have you received from members?

Determine the key message you want to include in your promotional material

What one thing would you want to get across to the public? What aspect of your centre do you feel is particularly strong? Is it the number of coaches you have, or maybe the social aspects and the friendly atmosphere within the centre?

Creating an Advert/Flyer

Advertising is an effective way of communicating to large number of people in your community. When you are preparing your advert or flyer, think carefully about what you want it to say. Here are some ideas to get you started:

- Target audience – does your advert/flyer speak directly and clearly to the people you want to reach?
- Focus – does it offer a single, central idea?
- Visibility – will your advert stand out on a page or a screen?
- Branding – is it immediately associated with your centre?
- Layout – is the layout clean, logical and easy to read? Does the headline draw the reader into the copy? Does the copy stop the reader from moving on?

And remember:

- Give the date, time and location for registration; contact number: plus any other vital information.
- Remember to always sell the benefits in their best light – ‘selling the sizzle, not the sausage’.
- Tell your customers what becoming involved with your centre will do for them!
- An advert/flyer should always answer the customer’s question – “But what does that mean to me”.
- Include a ‘call to action’ that makes the reader ‘do’ something.
- Avoid too much text; less is more!

Making the most of Signs and Banners

Signs are an undeniably effective way for you to communicate important information about your centre to the public, such as the key dates for registration.

- For your sign to be effective it needs to be visible either for people walking or driving.
- Include a header, which will grab the reader’s attention and draw them to the sign.
- Below the header, use the space to communicate essential information accurately and in full.
- The reader should be able to easily read and interpret the wording while answering all their likely questions.
- To ensure not too much information is crammed onto the sign, provide a website address for the reader to find out more information about what you’re communicating.
- It is vital that you tell the reader what they need to do to contact you such as a phone number or email address.

Embracing Technology

Use direct email

Whether you're promoting an event or maintaining strong relationships with your existing members, direct mail is a great way to make a more personal approach.

You already have a database and a bulk email tool in SportsTG – use it! This will enable you to use personalised mailings to let members know of news, events and other important updates. You can also target 'lapsed' or infrequent members to encourage them to return.

When sending direct email, make sure that you:

- Subject line and headline – use the headline to grab the recipient's attention, and to encourage them to read on.
- Content – remain focused on one key message, and avoid jargon. Steer clear of long sentences and use active sentences rather than passive ones whenever possible e.g. 'You will see...' not 'You will be shown...'
- Double check spelling and grammar.
- Call to action – be clear what you want the reader to do next. e.g. if you want them to call, print the number clearly, in bold perhaps, with times when the phone is manned. Also, give a deadline by which people should respond.

Distribute an electronic newsletter

Distributing a newsletter by email is an effective, low cost and immediate method of staying in touch with your members.

Some points to remember:

- Make the subject line clear;
- Use no more than two fonts otherwise your newsletter may start to look less professional;
- Keep the amount of content to 1000 words or less, otherwise it may become tiresome to read in an online format;
- Include stories that will be useful and of interest to a large proportion, if not all of your members;
- Add graphics that relate to the stories to help break up the text;
- And don't forget to add contact details, in more than one place if possible.

Keep your website up-to-date

Websites in recent years have become a lot more than just a method to electronically display information about your centre. By using links from your website to Clubs Online, you can allow the public to register and pay their membership fees online, thus saving you time and money with administration.

Websites are at the heart of most successful marketing campaigns. By promoting website addresses on marketing material, you are able to direct people to find out more information, while encouraging them to register for the season or particular events.

Your website must always be up-to-date!

Use social media

Social media such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram is also a useful marketing tool, if used properly.

Social media can:

- Promote your centre
- Increase the number of people you reach
- Tell members about successes or upcoming events
- Get feedback
- Create a community for your centre
- Engage your members and build a relationship with them
- Make your members feel loved!

If using social media, you need to:

- Place quality posts
- Place regular posts
- Comment on visitors posts and comments
- Post on other relevant pages
- Send updates to the people who like your page
- Upload photos of members that they can tag themselves in
- Share other relevant pages with your members

Using Local Media

Through the production of press releases, the media offers you a cost effective method of promoting your centre or an event you are running. If you have a story that is newsworthy and relevant to the local community, the media will allow you to promote this free to a large audience.

Press release essentials

The following information must be included on all press releases:

- Name and address of your centre and your contact details including name, phone number and email address.
- The date when you want the press to publish the release.
- Background information on your centre.

Layout:

Many people opt for line spacing of 1.5 to 2, but single is also fine. Releases should also be typed on one side only and should be between one and two pages long. Anything longer than this is probably full of 'waffle' and unnecessary information. Use 11 or 12 font size, and avoid fancy fonts.

In terms of style, don't start sentences with numerals e.g. "Twenty-three member will...". Always spell out numbers below 10 e.g. one, two, three etc.

Finally, at the foot of each full page put 'More' and at the end of the press release put 'Ends'.

Tips for dealing with journalists

Do:

- Do email press releases to journalists within the body of your email and not as an attachment.
- Do put the press release headline (or a summary of it) in the subject box of your email.
- Do follow up press releases with a telephone call to the individual emailed.
- Do observe journalists' busy times of the day and deadlines.

Don't:

- Don't phone a journalist before you have fully thought through the idea or story you want to discuss.
- Don't use email to 'sell' the story. Use the phone.
- Don't assume journalists will read your email. Always follow up with a phone call.

Press release template

Attention grabbing title

Every press release you write should have a strong title. Focus on 'firsts' e.g. one of your centre members is the first to qualify for a national event. As always avoid jargon.

First paragraph

Don't waffle or try to set the scene, but get straight into your story.

- Summarise who's involved;
- What's happened or is about to happen;
- Where and when the news took place or will take place;
- How events have unfolded so far, and why this is important.

The details

Follow up the first paragraph by filling in the details. The main things are to make sure you give the journalists all they need, and to make it as interesting as you can. Keep the sentence structure simple, explain complicated terms, and don't use jargon. Avoid hype and self-congratulation and never make a claim you can't back up. Remember that local media want a local angle. So think about how the story affects local people.

Quotes

Give interesting quotes from the people involved. When quoting someone, use the style - he/she said: "This is great news for the whole community". Avoid lofty terms like "he commented". Always provide full names and job titles, and if it's not clear, explain what the person does.

Photography

Photography breathes life into a story.

Engaging the Local Community & Local Business

It is important that your centre becomes a part of your local community. Develop links with local schools and businesses. Utilise the expertise in your community such as legal and financial professionals. Look at your centre as a large network of people which local businesses can promote its products and services to. Sell your centre, and illustrate how a business can be more visible in the community by being linked to your centre.

Retaining and Making the Most of Existing Members

If your new members are silver, then your existing members are gold!

Your current members, and their skills and knowledge, are probably the most valuable asset your centre has. They act as ambassadors and have a great influence on the atmosphere and peoples first impression of your centre. Don't focus just on who can help, but also what they can they do. Learn about the specific skills of your members. Have they got skills in IT or carpentry, or can they help with data entry? Volunteers, like any employees, will also respond better if they feel what they are doing is being valued.

Happy members will tell their friends and family how great your centre is. This is the most effective type of promotion, and best of all it's free! Try to show each existing member how you value them.