



Promoting Your Club

Promoting a Club

Why Bother?

People are aware of golf, cricket, football and other sports because they see the premises as they drive around. This is rarely the case with our sport and unless a club promotes itself people may simply not be aware that it exists - and it may find it difficult to recruit new members because promoting a club and recruitment are inextricably linked; the higher the profile, the easier to get new members.

- Clubs should also make an effort to promote themselves because most are “competing” with countless other social and voluntary organisations in their area for media and public attention and, not least, sponsorship.
- The better relations a club has with the local community and the local media, the better chance it has of either limiting adverse publicity, perhaps following an incident on an event, or lobbying e.g. for a lake for an event.
- Promoting a club needn't be expensive effort and ideas are more important than money.

Doing the work

If promotion is to be done properly one club member should be put in specific charge of it – promotion should not just be something tagged on to other club jobs.

It helps if the person has some knowledge of public relations or marketing but this is NOT essential, enthusiasm and common-sense are the most important qualities required.

The person doing the promotion job should be a member of, or at least attend, committee meetings so that they are fully aware of what is going on.

Style

The person in charge of promotion should, with the main committee, review the overall 'style' of the club and the image it presents to its members and to the general public. For example:

1. Does the club logo need a mild update'?
2. Does the club have a clear style for it's website, notepaper, invoices, business cards, in fact for all media & printed material?
3. Is the membership card attractive and likely to be an aid to recruitment if seen by nonmembers?
4. Use social media to promote a positive image for the club and linked to other local organisations / partners
5. where possible, forums should be closed to members or very well moderated

Recruiting

A club should have a simple leaflet about itself as an aid to recruitment outlining its activities, where and when it meets and so on; study leaflets in tourist information centres to see what other activities in the area are doing, then at least match their efforts.

Does the club have a web site? If so, is it kept up to date? Consider how off-putting an out-of-date poster is on a wall - a tired web site is no different. Persuade someone to act as 'web master' with everything connected with the site routed through them.

- Have you put up posters about the club in local shops, libraries etc.?
- Consider special recruitment 'days' where the club puts itself on show and has experts on hand with their boats to explain various aspects of the sport.
- Consider reduced entry fees for new members in their first year as a recruitment aid.
- Committee members should make an effort to welcome new members at club nights. It helps if key club members wear name badges.
- Some clubs have found it helps to give new members a specific 'contact' - someone they can call if they need advice about the club.

Community relations

- A club is, or should be, an integral part of its local community and should be active in this role.
- Is the club listed in the phone book and in any local guides to associations?
- Are club dates put in event diaries kept in most libraries?
- Do club dates appear in 'What's on' features in local newspapers and on local radio stations?
- A club should be represented where possible at town shows, fetes and so on. Is there someone in the club with marketing or exhibition experience who can help with a simple but professional looking display?
- Make sure the club is advertised as widely as possible in the local media – make use of the free publicity available to clubs by writing race reports and submitting them to the sports editor for example?
- Are there any community opportunities for club action which will generate media coverage? The possibilities are endless and if a club doesn't take them, then the media space will be filled by more dynamic local groups.
- If a club is lucky enough to have a club house, can it be offered to charitable groups for use? Is it clean, with up to date display material?
- If you don't have a club house but meet regularly in, say, a local hall, do you have a display board about the club which is kept up to date and acts as an advertisement for the club? Rotaries and Round Tables do this - why not us? Always have recruitment literature available.
- Have you considered reciprocal projects with other, groups in the area?
- Can anyone in the club be persuaded to give talks about the sport and the club to other organisations in the area? Talking to them is a good way of building useful friends and maybe even recruiting new members.

The Press

- Don't be afraid of working with the press. There's no magic about it.
- Find out names of motoring journalists and the names of sports editors at ALL morning, evening and weekly papers. One phone call to the switchboard operator of each newspaper will generally be enough to obtain all names. Also ask for editorial e-mail addresses.
- Get to know the local press; invite correspondents to your larger events.
- Know their copy deadlines and picture requirements.

Press releases

- Ideally you should have specially laid out Press Releases, you can set these up as Word templates for example.
- Type press releases in double spacing on one side of the paper only and leave wide margins at each side - all this will give a journalist space to edit a release.
- Keep releases brief and concise and use plain English. Keep sentences and paragraphs short. Avoid jargon - it will simply confuse.
- Spend time reading what is used by newspapers - try to aim to get exactly what you write into the paper without alteration. It is NOT impossible. No press release should really be more than 150 words.
 - Put the most important news first - if a journalist shortens a release he is likely to do so from the end.
 - Stress any local angle.
 - Try to answer Who? What? Why? Where? When? in a press release.
 - Try to include a quote e.g. "John Smith chairman of the ABC Model Car Club said..."
 - Don't over plug a sponsor's name in any press release, otherwise the press may throw it in the bin.
 - Don't send a flood of press releases otherwise your contacts will ignore them.
 - Give a name and contact numbers at the end for further information. Put the date too.
 - Keep at least two copies of every release issued. One for your own file ~ the other for any sponsors.

List the circulation list on each release filed. Try and make sure you get a cutting of everything. Local libraries are a good source - pages can be photocopied. Identify each cutting with name of publication and date it appeared.

Photographs

- The promotions man should try to get someone in the club to liaise with him to produce a flow of suitable press pictures; these should be as professional as possible with no flowers growing out of people's heads and so on.
- If you get a household name attending an event your at, ring up the local sports editor and discuss the opportunity of arranging a photo-session.
- If photographs are taken of prize winners, have the club badge in the background. If possible the photographer should have checked beforehand exactly where people should stand.
- Send images of a reasonable resolution – 5MP for pictures going into printed media, but down to 1MP for a website, make sure the file is appropriately titled.
- Pictures MUST be sent with a note in the email of what each one refers too – and the names of the people featured in it.
- Make it quite clear that a picture is copyright free - newspapers will be put off if there appears to be any doubt.

Radio and TV

- Although there will be most opportunities with local radio, don't despair of getting a story on local TV – it happens more often than you'd think.
- Try to develop contacts at local stations and keep in touch with them. Radio and TV need voices as well as news so be prepared for someone in the club ~ who should be properly briefed - to be interviewed. This needn't be the chairman if someone else proves better at it.
- Anyone being interviewed should avoid alcoholic hospitality beforehand and should concentrate and listen to the questions.
- Speak up, be definite and don't ramble.
- If you don't know the answer to something, say so, don't waffle. Avoid jargon.
- Occasionally be prepared for an awkward questions perhaps on environmental issues.
- Keep calm, but don't get too relaxed and on no account lose your temper.
- Be cautious in plugging club sponsors too much. You may not be asked to appear again if you do and too many plugs make poor entertainment anyway.
- Resist the temptation to try too hard to be funny - it probably won't work.

Bad Publicity

- If, despite all your efforts, the club gets bad publicity, avoid over-reacting. Correct important errors but if you charge in with guns blazing about something tucked away in a newspaper on page 5, you may elevate it to even worse publicity on page 1!
- All the efforts of a promotions officer will be undone if club members roar away from a club meeting place late at night and annoy the public. If there is a problem like this stress to members the problems and ask for their co-operation.
- To avoid unnecessarily bad publicity it may be wise for clubs running larger events to hold "what if" crisis planning meetings to discuss the consequences of, say, a serious incident. Be quite clear who can speak publicly on such occasions - off-the-cuff comments by all and sundry may simply mean legal and/or insurance problems later.

Archives

- With many clubs reaching significant birthday milestones, "then and now" stories are proving popular with local newspapers and magazines. These are much easier to arrange if old material is available and clubs should encourage someone to act as "archivist" and contact older members for their memories and, with luck, memorabilia. Local newspaper files may prove useful for stories about the highlights of the club. For the sake of future generations (when they are celebrating 20th and 30th anniversaries of the club!), keep ALL club magazine, event regulations, committee minutes and so on.

Sponsorship

- A club hoping to attract support for an event or championship must recognise that sponsorship is, or should be, a two way business deal, not charity or patronage. Of course local organisations may support a club for other than full-blooded commercial reasons but nevertheless a club must aim to offer value for money.
- Clubs should also recognise that finding sponsorship may not (in fact almost certainly will not) be easy as there are countless other sports and activities out there seeking support. And sponsorship practices change; for example a few years ago TV programme sponsorship was rare, now it is commonplace and sucks up money which would otherwise go elsewhere.
- Although, as with a lot of selling, there is no guarantee of success at the end of the day, your chances will be improved if you plan your approach carefully. The sales skills required are the same as any other selling activities so you may benefit from reading general sales books
- First, consider what you have to offer and if it can be improved. If you seek sponsorship for an event would it be more appealing if part of a championship? Can you get a local radio or newspaper interested? If you have a club room or rostrum available for sponsors, is it time it had a quick coat of paint.
- Next, list all the possible benefits to a potential sponsor; these could include: title to the event, company name on competing cars and official media (such as a event website); advert in programme, banner advertising opportunities around the track, opportunity to organise displays and promotions around the event; hospitality opportunities; benefits from local TV and other media coverage. Plus, of course, the community relations benefits of supporting a local club in the local community.
- If an event attracted media coverage in previous years whether in local newspapers or television, mention this and keep copies of press material to show to potential sponsors.
- Next prepare a draft proposal including:
 - a. An introduction to the event and the organisers.
 - b. Specific details about the event where, when, how many entrants/ spectators etc.
 - c. Specific benefits as listed above.
 - d. Possible media coverage.
 - e. A final summary possibly mentioning how much money is sought and how it will be spent.

By completing this exercise you will have a clear picture of what you are offering to a sponsor and you should then be able to deal with any queries.

- Once you have drafted the basic information, try to get a hard-nosed business friend to take an outsider's look and play devil's advocate and based on this, put it into a more formal presentation. This could range from a straight letter (well typed of course) to a brochure, to a PowerPoint presentation with video - it all depends on how much sponsorship you are after, what you are offering and to some extent the size of company you are approaching.
- The next stage is to approach potential sponsors but before contacting companies first consider 'who you know' because personal contact is one of the most effective ways of raising sponsorship. The Committee of a club and other influential members should be roped in to help in the search. Strings are meant to be pulled, so pull them.
- If this fails and you have to approach companies cold then cast your net widely and plan your approach in a businesslike way. And don't give up - if the first approach to a company results in a negative response, perhaps you can change the proposal slightly and go back later a second or third time, when the outcome may be more positive.

- The aim of a written approach should be to fix a meeting at which a club can present its proposals.
- Don't go to such meetings mob handed but do go with people who are articulate and can present a case well.
- Rehearse the presentation, preferably in front of someone used to such proposals.
- Don't waffle - if you have 30 minutes allocated for a meeting then don't make the presentation longer than 10 minutes so that there is time for discussion.
- Don't use R.C. jargon - not everyone will understand it.
- Don't promise what you can't deliver - that's a sure way of having a disappointed sponsor (and maybe even litigation).
- How much should a club ask for? This obviously depends on the importance of the event which is why involving the local media will enhance the value. Try to relate the sum you seek to something e.g. 'that would only buy you two ads in the XYZ paper'. Remember you can negotiate downwards on price but rarely upwards.
- If you reach an agreement with a sponsor, put things in writing, either a simple letter of intent or a formal contract - this will help avoid "who said what" arguments later if things go wrong or a key person on the sponsor's side moves on. Incidentally, if a sponsorship deal does break down or a sponsor decides to quit at the end of the contract period, don't slag them off in the local press. All that will do is deter other potential sponsors.
- If the club is registered for VAT (or will be above the limit when the sponsorship limit is taken into account) then VAT will need to be charged and provided for in the agreement.
- Look after your sponsor to ensure the partnership continues in years to come. It is much easier to keep a sponsor than to have to search for new ones. This does not generally mean taking your sponsor out for expensive meals, but simply involving them and helping them achieve their own objectives. If your sponsor is not actively involved in the event, it is in your club's interest to at least keep him or her informed.
- Think what extra you can offer sponsors. A simple plaque presented to them at the event may help make them feel welcome and that much more part of the club.
- Above all, don't take the money and then forget a sponsor.

