

Planning Your Club's Future

By John Sadler, Public Relations Officer, PDC of Philas

There are rumours circulating that some of our Clubs and Societies are having difficulty in attracting new members. This is a common problem for many clubs, and if your club is so affected, we hope that after reading this article, your optimism for the future will be stimulated.

It is almost a given that most of our members are of a senior nature, and hence we will continually lose members through reluctance or inability to travel at night, relocating following retirement, failing health, and death.

Members are of two types. Firstly, there are those who are steadfast and thoroughly enjoy their club, and will continue to support the club whilst ever they are able. The second type of members is the nomad. The nomads are not sure what they want, and their tenure will generally be from one meeting to (say) twenty four months. From our experience, one out of three new members will be converted to the first type, and hence two will fall away. In other words, to recruit one contented new member, you must attract at least three to grow your numbers in the long run. It is important to realize this fact right from the outset.

There are two major steps to be undertaken in attracting new members –

1. Conduct an audit of your club to ascertain how attractive it appears to outsiders, and how accessible it is to third party communications; and
2. When you are happy that you have a viable product to sell, then explore the promotional options that are appropriate.

1. Conducting an Audit

Conducting an audit requires an honest approach to a number of areas

1. How easy is it to get in touch with the club?
2. How attractive are the activities of the Club?
3. How dynamic are the club management group?
4. How suitable is your meeting place, day and time?
5. What information is given to new members?
6. How content are the members and are they enthusiastic about the benefits of club membership?
7. What interaction does the club have with the general public?

1.1 Communication

Communication is a most important aspect. Many clubs only offer a postal address for communication. In this day and age of instant communication, a postal address is no longer appropriate, and will more than likely turn prospective new members away, as it takes too long for a reply. These days people don't want to wait for answers, they want them now. Therefore your contacts must at least include a telephone number, and preferably an email address. If the club has either a website of its own, or is listed in the Philas website, you will at least be creating an awareness of your activities, but these sites again must include immediate contacts.

Liz Nahkla is currently trying to contact many of our clubs in order to update the information shown on the Philas website. Liz is offering the clubs an opportunity to promote themselves. From some of the replies which she is receiving, there seems to be clubs which are reluctant to promote themselves. This is a golden opportunity for clubs and every advantage should be taken of it.

1.2 Attractiveness

The attractiveness of the club is going to be the main reason why prospective members will make contact. Attractiveness covers the activities during the club meetings, the timing of those meetings, and what other services the club offers its members.

Are the activities during your meetings interesting. If you have displays, do you take advantage of non-member displays to provide both quality and variation. Do you continually look for different displays each year. Do you take advantage of the Visiting Displayer program offered by the Australian Philatelic Federation?

What activities are available to members to assist them? Do you have all or any of the following –

- Exchange books;
- Sales by tender;
- Library;
- Assistance in acquiring philatelic material;
- Does a stamp dealer attend your meetings;
- Supper during or after the meeting.

1.3 Dynamic Management Group

The primary officers responsible for club administration, and therefore direction, are the President, Secretary and Treasurer. These three officers need to be constantly reviewing the appeal of all of the club's activities, and to be prepared to make changes when required.

Does your constitution provide for a regular change in the office of President to ensure a continual flow of new ideas? Are new ideas encouraged from members, and if so, are they enthusiastically followed up?

1.4 Meeting Place, Day and Time

Is your meeting place, day and time still suitable to the majority of the members. With increasing age many members may be more supportive with a daytime meeting, say, on a Saturday afternoon, rather than in the evening. Also there could be advantages in relocating your meeting place to be more conveniently serviced by public transport.

1.5 Induction of New Members

It is most important to make new members welcome, and to have them feel that they are a part of the club. Do you present them with a copy of the club's constitution and a club information sheet, listing the club's officers, its activities and the benefits of club membership.

Are they left to fend for themselves, or are they introduced to the club President, as well as any other member with similar collecting interests.

1.6 Contented Members

Contented members can be your best means of attracting new members. When they are happy they will be enthusiastic about the club and its activities in conversations with friends, and this enthusiasm will make others want to be part of "the action".

1.7 Interaction with the General Public

Does the club have any activities to which the general public is invited, such as an annual club stamp show or market day. Are there regular market days during the year? How successful are these activities? Is their success waning or growing?

Naturally, such events are a real opportunity to put the club on show and thereby appeal to prospective members.

1.8 Assessing the Result

Once you have completed your audit, the next step is to adjust any areas which you consider are less than desirable. Once these adjustments are made and are working satisfactorily, you are in a position to confidently promote your club.

If you are not sure about any of the above, contact the Philatelic Development Officer (PDO) responsible for your club. The current officers are

PDO Metropolitan	David Collyer	developmentmetro@nswpdc.org.au
PDO Country	Ed Wolf	developmentcountry@nswpdc.org.au

Alternatively, these officers can be contacted by telephone through Philas on (02) 9264 8301 or (02) 9264 8406 (answer-phone). If the PDO's cannot help, they will certainly put you in touch with someone who can.

2. Promotional Activities

The following are a range of possibilities, not all of which will be suitable in all cases. It is a matter of selecting those which are appropriate to your circumstances, and then acting on same.

1. Advertising in the local newspaper
2. Solicit editorial space in the local newspaper
3. Interview in local newspaper prior to a special event
4. Advertising on the local radio
5. Interviews on local radio
6. Hold a Stamp Fair
7. Negotiate with AAA Stamps to put on a Stamp Fair with you.
8. Hold a Street Stall
9. Distribute leaflets, Distribute copies of your annual program, Advertise in shop windows and local clubs
10. Write the History of the Club
11. Give a short talk at a local community event
12. Make a presentation to local Service Organisations
13. Ensure that the information in Philas News is up to date
14. Advertise your special events in Philas News
15. Ensure that your club's information in the Philas website is up to date
16. Seek other philatelic websites such as APF
17. Start your own website
18. Listing via the local Council website
19. Listing in Stamp News
20. List special events in the Australia Post Stamp Bulletin
21. Alter your meeting time and/or day
22. Consider amalgamation.

2.1 Local Newspaper Advertising

Advertise for members in the local newspaper, taking the biggest size ad that your budget will allow. The bigger and more striking the ad the better your chances of success. Always remember that the smaller the ad, the less chance there is of it being seen.

The ad must list as many of the benefits of club membership that can be fitted in. After all, you want the readers to be very keen to join with such an appealing organization.

2.2 Editorial Space in the Local Newspaper

Approach the local newspaper to have your regular meetings, as well as any special events, included in the "What's On" section of the paper. Such inclusions are usually free. Make sure that these insertions include the planned activity for that night.

2.3 Interview in the Local Newspaper

Prior to any special event, try and arrange the local newspaper to interview the event organizer on some interesting topic associated with the event. This could be the theme of the event, or the special activities included in the event.

The interview topic must certainly be of general interest, but it is also an opportunity to get in some general information regarding the Club's activities.

2.4 Local Radio Advertising

This is an effective medium for local events, and where the radio station supports local community activity, the ads can be free. The ads need to be attractive and feature the main points.

2.5 Interview on the Local Radio

This is similar to 2.3 above, but a different medium. In this case you need to consider the time when the interview will be broadcast to ensure that it reaches the target audience.

2.6 Hold a Stamp Fair

Many clubs already hold some annual event to attract members of the public. Stamp fairs can vary quite widely from club to club. Naturally, it is important to have a number of dealers present who are willing to both buy and sell, as well as offer a valuation service.

Souvenir items can be useful, and can be an added attraction. The number of such items should not be excessive. Only produce what you reasonably believe that you can sell, bearing in mind that the smaller the number produced, the more desirable the item becomes. Naturally, the quantity produced must be balanced with the costs associated with the production.

Make sure that you select a venue that is easily accessible, and where parking is readily available. Lack of parking will keep people away.

A special activity held in conjunction with the fair will increase the appeal. This activity need not be philatelic, but requires local participation, with the result being announced at your event.

2.7 Negotiate with AAA Stamps to put on a Stamp Fair with you

In the September 2007 issue of *Philas News* we publicised the offer from AAA Stamps to put on a Stamp Fair in conjunction with the local stamp club. These fairs are to be held on the Saturday before the Petersham Town Hall Stamp Fair, which is held on the 5th Sunday of any month.

The Manager of AAA Stamps, Stephen Burton, can be contacted as follows for further information -

Postal Address: PO Box 1050 Warners Bay NSW 2282

Telephone: (02) 4954 4002

Email: aaastamps@yahoo.com.au

Mobile telephone: 0432 540 760

2.8 Hold a Street Stall

A street stall can sometimes be very successful to attract interest in your activities.

To be effective you will require interesting signage to ensure passers-by stop and talk to you. Once they do this, you have an opportunity to impress them.

2.9 Distribute Leaflets

Prepare leaflets detailing all the good things that occur at your club together with a list of contacts. It is important that at least one contact is a telephone number, preferably with the name of the person being called.

These leaflets can then be distributed by

- mail boxes within the vicinity of your meeting place;
- affixing to telegraph poles, etc;
- handing them out at busy locations;
- having them displayed in shop windows;
- having them displayed on noticeboards in local clubs, post offices and libraries; or

- by any combination of the above.

The leaflets could be substituted with a copy of your annual program.

2.10 Write the History of the Club

This can be very effective where the club is reaching a significant milestone in its existence. Under these circumstances, local newspapers would be interested in publishing the abbreviated history, which becomes good free advertising.

Copies of the club history, properly presented, could be left at local libraries, and possibly, other service organizations and post offices.

The history needs to be easy to read and accentuate the “fun” side of the hobby, preferably with interesting anecdotes.

2.11 Give a Short Talk at a Local Community Event

Community events can sometimes involve the participation of the various groups and clubs within that community. Seek the opportunity to give a short talk on the benefits of both philately as a hobby, and your club as a means of advancing that interest in stamp collecting.

2.12 Give a Presentation to Local Service Organisations and Church Groups

Many organizations are constantly seeking speakers to present different topics of interest to their members. This generally involves a talk of from 45 to 60 minutes. Such a talk should include some details of the Club which the speaker represents, and be supported by examples.

An interesting talk on stamp collecting can be instrumental in attracting new members.

2.13 Ensure that Philas News Data is Current

Each issue of *Philas News* contains details regarding the activities of all of affiliated clubs, both in the *Society Scene* and *Coming Events* sections. Ensure that your club's information is correct and if you find an error or omission, advise the PDC Public Relations Officer by email to publicrelations@nswpdc.org.au. Alternatively, advise the Editor using the contact details on page 2 of this magazine.

2.14 Advertise Your Special Events in Philas News for Free

All affiliated clubs can insert a free half page ad in the issue of *Philas News* immediately prior to their special event. Take advantage of this offer to boost the awareness of your event. To do so, you need to contact the PDC Public Relations Officer by email to publicrelations@nswpdc.org.au. You have the option of sending a formatted ad or simply providing the details and the ad will be prepared for you.

2.15 Ensure the Philas Website Data is Current

Philas is constantly updating the information in their website to ensure that it is as current as possible. This can only be kept current based upon the detail, accuracy and timeliness of the information provided by the clubs themselves. Ensure that the information currently being shown for your club is both current and complete. In checking this information, look not only at the main Clubs & Societies page, but also at any links which appear in your club's listing.

If any changes are required contact the Webmaster by email to webmaster@philas.org.au.

2.16 Seek Other Websites for Your Club's Listing

Another significant philatelic website in Australia is that operated by the Australian Philatelic Federation (APF). This website contains a great wealth of information regarding Philately in Australia and also for each of the States.

There are other philatelic websites in Australia, and new ones are appearing all the time. Check these out, looking for possibilities to have your club listed.

2.17 Start Your Own Website

If you consider that other websites do not fully represent your club, then start your own website. A simple website is not that difficult to create nor is it expensive to maintain.

Once established the website becomes a very practical and speedy means of communication. In addition, there are constantly people searching the web and your informative website could bring surprising results.

2.18 Listing on the Local Council Website

Most Municipal and Shire Councils now have websites containing details of *News and Events* scheduled to occur, and/or *Recreational Clubs* located within their area. Your special events should be listed as soon as the date is determined. Such listings are generally free.

2.19 Listing in Stamp News

The monthly magazine, Stamp News, contains listings of all, or most, of the stamp clubs in Australia. Check this listing to ensure that your club's information is correctly shown.

2.20 List Special Events in Australia Post's Stamp Bulletin

In Australia Post's regular magazine Stamp Bulletin, there is a section called Stamp Shows & Events. Investigate the possibility of listing your special events here. This magazine has a very wide circulation which can only be beneficial.

2.21 Alter Your Meeting Place, Time and/or Day

A quick look at the members of any stamp club will soon reveal that most of them are getting on in years. A lot of older people do not like to travel at night. It may be that your meeting venue is no longer suitable due to either an aging membership or to changes within the vicinity. Adequate parking is always an important consideration.

Consult the members to determine whether a change of meeting place, time and/or day could be advantageous. There are now quite a few daylight clubs. Such a change may be the key to your club's enhanced future.

2.22 Consider Amalgamation

If your club is struggling, look to amalgamate with another club, especially if there is a contingent of common members. Such an amalgamation could greatly enhance the future of both clubs by reducing duplicated costs such as rental.

3. Conclusion

The above are a few suggestions regarding promoting your club. Not all of them are applicable in many cases, but they will act as thought-starters.

Do not be too disappointed if your promotional activities do not yield instant results. The important thing is that you have sown the seeds, and quite often the yield may be quite some months away, but it will eventually come, generally for quite surprising reasons.

From the above it can be seen that there are quite a number of different places where information regarding your club is available. If you do make any changes, it is imperative that you notify all of the sources affected.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the assistance given to me in the composition of this article by Brian Roberts, of Campbelltown District Philatelic Society.