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Clubs Update Issue #13, January 2007

Dear Member

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Two timely issues for the start of the new year in this issue - and both are concerned with membership. The first considers how to retain the active interest of your members, whilst the second explores the increasingly important subject of communicating regularly with your members. Thanks for the feedback: we always look forward to your comments so that we can continue to develop the *Help for Clubs* service.

Reader's Query: How can we keep more of our members from one year to the next?

Marie S from Dundee asks: "We have a large number of young members in our club. This keeps the club healthy and lively, but every year, a high proportion of them fail to renew their membership. We seem to spend a lot of time recruiting new members and then introducing them to the way our club works. Are we doing something wrong?"

A high turnover of members in an organisation is sometimes called "member churning". Whilst your membership numbers may be high, if there is a relatively high turnover from one year to the next you don't have a very stable club. A lot of effort will be devoted to recruitment and induction that could otherwise be more profitably spent on retaining those members. The first step is to ask two basic questions:

1. What is attracting new members to join the club?, and
2. What are their reasons for not renewing their membership?

You really need to be asking these questions directly of each member. You could add some simple questions to the membership or renewal form: what makes you interested in this club?; what do you find most valuable about the club?; what one thing would you like the club to do differently? By collating all the answers to these simple questions over a period of time, you'll build up a much clearer picture of your members and their needs. People tend to retain their membership - even if they're not very active personally - if they value what the club is doing and enjoy their time at the club.

There are some ways of getting closer to your members that various sports clubs have

adopted:

- Stay in regular touch with all your members; send out club mailings with interesting information; there are some ideas about member communications in the next section of this issue of Clubs Update.
- Encourage your officers and committee members to talk informally with club members on a regular basis; this can be at matches, social events or amongst the supporters; get to know what they're thinking.
- Make sure that your AGM is friendly and welcoming; encourage members to turn up and raise issues of concern; consider holding a social event, awards evening, or gala at the same time as the AGM so those actively engaged in your sport can come along easily.
- Review the way you collect subscriptions; it's a well-documented fact that people who pay by direct debit are far less likely to cancel their membership than those who have to write a cheque each year.
- Make sure that your membership offers good 'value-for-money'; how does the subscription compare with other clubs?; just what do members get for their subscription?; can you demonstrate a definite financial advantage from joining rather than allowing people to pay per session or event?

There's more information about growing and retaining your membership at

▶ [Growing your Membership](#)

Readers Queries

If you have a question about any aspect of running and organising a sports club that you'd like the editorial team at Clubs Update to answer, please send it to ▶ helpforclubs@sportscotland.org.uk. Each month, we'll select one or two questions to answer.

Communicating with Members

Staying in regular touch with your members is crucial to retaining their interest. A club newsletter used to be regarded as an essential part of any club membership. Whilst printed newsletters are still valuable, their cost - both in generating the content and in printing and posting copies - can be high. Electronic communication offers a way of maintaining good regular contact with an increasing proportion of your members at a fraction of the cost.

There are now several well-developed systems for communicating on a regular basis with your members using email. A growing number of clubs have developed their own websites. These range from the simple (this is where we are and what we do) to the complex (discussion forums, fixtures lists, team selection, results service, etc.). You can purchase a domain name such as ▶ www.AnytownSportsClub.org.uk for under £10 a year. There's certain to be someone in your club who can create a simple website, and most large ISPs will provide you with some free space to publish the website. However, one secret to a successful website is to regularly update the content so that it looks 'fresh' every time a member re-visits it. Another secret is to actively publicise the website address and really encourage members to use it e.g. by constantly reminding them that this is the best way to access the latest information about the club.

Most people are getting very familiar with email. Whilst many of us get too much junk email, we also welcome relevant email on those matters that we want to stay informed about. There are now many simple ways of staying in touch with members by email.

The first job is to collect their email address: make sure you do this on the subscription renewal form.

You can then create an automated email list system for creating and distributing email newsletters to all your members. ▶ www.listserve.com is one well-known system. Many clubs establish a simple online and email 'group' site such as ▶ www.yahogroups.com. You can create either an open or a closed 'group' for your club and invite your members to join. Each group offers the facility for news articles, photographs, documents and discussions. Members can choose to be alerted to new content by email. An excellent but slightly more sophisticated system is offered by ▶ www.communityzero.com. For a low annual cost, you can create a members-only website with news articles, events/fixtures, documents to download, discussion forums, member directories, and much more.

Finally, there is an excellent guide to 'How to Communicate Effectively' in the Running Sport series.

▶ [Communicating with Members](#)

Improving Help for Clubs

An editorial panel is reviewing the content of *Help for Clubs* to make sure that its all relevant, useable and accessible. We are also checking the overall useability of the site and would welcome comments from club users. If you are willing to take part in a 20-minute review of the site, please contact Ronnie Macquaker.

▶ [Email Ronnie Macquaker](#)

We would welcome your suggestions for new sections, new content, new features and ways of improving the layout and presentation. Please do let us know using the Comments function.

▶ [Your comments about Help for Clubs](#)

Got some club information to share?

Help for Clubs is expanding every month. If you have information that you think would be useful to other clubs, please do let us know.

▶ [Submit feedback](#)

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▶ <http://www.helpforclubs.org.uk>

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