



MEET AND GREET

Sue Froggatt writes about introducing and retaining new members.

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When new members join your club some will have no problems getting involved. Sue Froggatt shows how to introduce and retain new members.

A strategic approach would be to introduce an 'orientation' objective into your membership development plan, one that sets out an agreed schedule of contact which gives new members guidance on how to meet their initial expectations and achieve a sense of value. Alternatively you could simply look at a list of welcoming ideas and try out those you feel would suit your club. In this article I will cover both approaches.

A strategic approach to orientation

Having a systematic approach to making new members feel welcome using a schedule of contact will ensure consistency and momentum. The schedule should be a carefully planned, timely and relevant flow of materials and invitations, blended with conversations with staff and other members to educate and involve them quickly. Here is a sample schedule of contact:

- ✉ Step 1: Acknowledge receipt of their application form within a day. Send them an email or thank you note that you have received their application. Let them know what is happening next and how long it will take to process. This sets the tone for your relationship and makes you look highly responsive to members.
- ✉ Step 2: Send them a welcome pack. There are many things you could include, so be careful not to overwhelm them. You will find a list of 25 different types of items to include listed at www.suefroggatt.com. You might want to consider either staggering despatch, sending parts electronically, pointing them to your web site for more information or sending them a list of what is available and ask them to indicate what they would like sent next on a request for information form. Alternatively this form could be sent out in step 1 above, so the pack that arrives contains exactly what they need.
- ✉ Step 3: After they have had chance to look over the pack, have someone telephone them and personally welcome them.

Also:

1. Check their contact details are correct because there is nothing more annoying than having your name and contact details incorrect.
2. Identify what they expect. Why did they join? It is important to recognise what type of member they are in order to understand what they will value from their club. Extensive research into 100,000 members of associations/organisations shows that they will fall into nine different categories, so it is important to understand their personal needs.
3. You also need to check their perceptions are correct regarding what they expect out of their club and adjust any misunderstandings early on.
4. Help them understand how to take advantage of their membership. Use the call to help create awareness for undiscovered services and products.
5. Gently encourage them to participate. For example, connect them with someone with the same interests or invite them to an event.

One association was very sceptical about doing this and thought it would be a waste of resources. But after testing, it proved so successful they hired someone to do this full time. Their salary was more than covered by the increase in renewals.

Make sure you set the ground rules. Schedule a time for the call and let the member know how long it will take. I would suggest 10 minutes maximum.

- ✉ Step 4: After a few months send them a new member satisfaction survey. Call them to explain its importance and check it has arrived. You will find a template of a sample questionnaire at www.suefroggatt.com.
- ✉ Step 5: Call everyone after six months to check up that they have got value out of their membership. Reconfirm what they want. Let them know their opinions and ideas are welcome and tell them about this month's events or launches and if they have not yet started to engage suggest ways and encourage them to get involved according to their criteria. Use a coupon with an expiry date to encourage them to purchase publications or events.

Other ideas

1. Identify the five most common things new members do in the first six months. After three months check to see who has done less than one of these items on the list and then put effort behind encouraging this group to get involved. You might want to set an objective to have a certain percentage of new members engaged in at least two of these activities within six months.
2. Encourage networking. Use icebreakers at the start of each event to give people explicit permission to talk to a stranger. Train people in how to network. Networking is an important personal and business skill that they forgot to teach us at school. Help or train people in how to remember everyone's name and put photographs in members' directories. Introduce a budding or mentoring system.

3. Hold special events for new members. Have a special new member session before the start of events so new people can meet other new people and introduce committee members. If members are geographically dispersed have a new member teleconference session. The technology to do this is very easy. Alternatively set up a special new member newsgroup on your web site.
4. Promote them. Have a new member column in your newsletter or on your web site. Use their photograph, highlight their professional and personal interests and ask them to put down a sentence of who they would be interested in connecting with. Ask existing members to go out of their way to make a new member feel welcome. Have a new member slot at meetings and give new members a minute to speak and introduce themselves. Some might not want to do this so, make it optional.
5. Set up a special ‘Orientation Committee’ to focus on looking after new members. For example, they could design an information sheet for newcomers attending a business meeting or seminar what to bring and wear. Ask them to focus on people who have joined on a trial membership because they have a particularly high attrition rate because they did not make full financial investment and so are less committed.
6. Have a ‘Give & Get’ notice board at all events. This is for people to add post-it notes to highlight what they have to give to another member and what they are looking for. It is a great place for people who don’t know anyone to stand at an event and helps connect people who can help.
7. Acknowledge recruiters. Thank people who introduced new members and reward them with a bonus if the new member renews. This will encourage them to help them make sure their contacts are happy with your club.

New members represent an important group for two reasons. Their first year is the best opportunity to lay the foundation for long-term loyalty and the year that most members are likely to leave because the passive members will have a perception of little value.

So you need to develop a range of engaging strategies and tactics to ensure that their expectations are fulfilled, otherwise you might lose them. Finally do not leave it for ten months to find out if a new member is happy because by then it will be too late. They often make a decision not to renew months before the renewal notice arrives!

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