

George Wittorff is a member of the Board of the NRAA, given the task of addressing membership issues facing the movement at a national level, and developing and investigating strategies that State Associations and local clubs could gainfully use in a concerted effort to attract and retain members.

This is the fifth of a series of articles aimed at achieving that goal

ASAPS

Advancing Shooting as A Positive Sport

Members may recall that in the first article of this series, I presented graphs, both National and individual State/Territory Association showing membership trends over the periods 2001-2007-2015.

With the exception of QRA and NTRA these graphs showed a steady decline in membership within the States/Territories and when aggregated, showed a steady decline in National membership.

I have extrapolated these results based on the assumption that the decline will continue uninterrupted, and then added a 'decay factor' based on the ageing of the membership which will increase the rate of the drop-off of membership.

Take note people, that unless YOU start to address this issue at a local club level, I estimate that our national membership will have fallen to approximately 2,500 by the year 2050.

"Not my concern!" I hear the response. "I'll be long gone by then."

I agree with the second part of that sentiment, but not the first. Membership is everyone's concern, and the way to turn declining membership around is to have forward thinking, positive current members to decide to start TODAY to actively work to have their club seek new members.

Thinking positively, promoting our sport and acting decisively WILL get positive results.

STRATEGIES CLUBS CAN USE TO ATTRACT AND RETAIN MEMBERS

A recent Australian Sports Commission (ASP) article entitled "Market Segmentation for Sport Participation" showed that within the Australian population a total of 25% of those aged between 14-65 years of age were currently not members of sports clubs, but expressed interest in joining one.

This equates to over 3.9 million Australians who are potentially new club members.

What follows are research-based strategies that can be adopted to increase and maintain a club's membership.

Make it easy to get involved

This report also indicated that 20% of people who want to get involved in a club don't know how to do so.

Clubs need to engage their community and send out invitations to as many places as is possible. Most importantly, clubs should have a website, because this is how many people now search for information. Your website must have an open invitation to come and be get involved in the club. It should list a club person's name and contact details.

Of course, websites only hook those people who consciously seek the club information out. Many people who would like to become involved do not actively

search for this information, so clubs could consider using various forms of invitations, such as:

- articles in local 'free' newspapers
- posters, flyers around friendly shops, newsagents, sports shops, hardwares etc. (There is a ready-made flyer on the NRAA website under 'Membership Toolbox'.)
- using council communication to invite people to a shoot

Any form of invitation/advertising should promote inclusiveness and dispel any misconceptions that Rifle Clubs are exclusive, or that membership is dependent on skill level.

Make it clear that your club welcomes a diverse membership, in age, gender, culture, ethnicity etc.

Flexibility and enjoyment will drive participation

Where possible, create a range of club activities and opportunities for people to participate at times convenient to potential new members. E.g., Field or Service shooting on alternative weekends or even mid week. (*See ATR 125 Membership article describing the Busselton model*).

Remember: "Provide it, and they will come".

Try to create some shoots each season which are focused more on participation, enjoyment and socialization rather than competition and winning.

Create opportunities to invite potential members to try out shooting and explore club facilities. It has been proven that running regular 'come and try' sessions to introduce potential new members to shooting is a great way to break down barriers.

Other methods of encouraging potential new members to your club include:

- free trial shoots
- introductory/beginner sessions
- potential financial incentives. E.g., reduced initial fees.

Family friendly

Where possible, create family-based membership options, which reduce barriers to joining your club. Options which are attractive to people with families include:

- family membership
- basic playground equipment near clubhouses
- ensuring the club has a culture whereby members use respectful and acceptable language and display appropriate range etiquette

Cost of membership

Cost of membership is often quoted as an issue in the retention of members. It is therefore important for clubs to focus on creating an experience where members feel they are getting value for money.

Some ways to offset the barrier of cost is to:

- have flexible membership options in terms of pricing and payment terms
- family membership concessions
- free beginner's sessions.

Innovative and positive strategies by clubs could result in members being able to acquit their membership fees by undertaking activities to offset the cost of membership. For example, if a club membership is \$100, then give members the opportunity to have this paid by such activities as:

- introduce a club sponsor to the value of \$200 (so the club effectively gets the \$100 membership and \$100 sponsorship).
- Create a raffle and as an inducement for members to sell tickets, so that if they sell \$200 worth of tickets their \$100 membership would be paid for.

The above are ideas only; there are other means of addressing the issue with a little positive thought at the club level. Examples such as the above (and others) gives those on limited incomes the opportunity to cover membership without it becoming obvious they have some financial constraints, and importantly, helps to retain existing members.

Strong social calendar

Over half of those surveyed by the ASP indicated an important part of joining a club is to enjoy the social environment.

Surprisingly perhaps, for many the social benefits of club membership is of primary importance, so it is vital that every club aims at having a healthy social agenda as well as a shooting calendar.

Social shoots and club activities create opportunities for members to bring potential members into the club in a relaxed setting and are great ways to overcome any misconceptions of clubs being cliquy and exclusive.

Tip: Don't fall into the trap of only creating social events as a way of gaining funds for the club.

Share the load

There is always a danger that good club leaders are taken for granted and become expected to carry the burden of making sure flags are placed, target maintenance is attended to, shooting program organised etc, etc. Make it a standard club practice that jobs and duties are shared and rotated.

This is a double edged sword in that no one person is overloaded while at the same time all club members are given some specific ownership thus making sure the club is a cohesive and happy unit.

Conclusion

It's doubtful that any one club would be able to tick off all of the suggestions above as being either relevant or achievable, but if all clubs made an effort to tick and implement at least one of the suggestions given, then I am optimistic enough to think that each of those clubs would start to consider other ways to make their club more vibrant, welcoming and attractive to existing and prospective shooters alike.

Give it a go, and always Advance Shooting as a Positive Sport.

Reference: Sports Community Resources
Australian Sports Commission (ASP): "Market Segmentation for Sport Participation"
