

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.

This is number 7 of a series of articles aimed at achieving that goal.

ASAPS

Advancing Shooting as A Positive Sport

The previous six articles, spanning 12 months have tried to alert all members to the steady decline in membership, and been aimed at State Associations and club leaders in an attempt to raise people's consciousness to the point that some positive action to attract new members and to retain them as well as existing members has taken place. This article is a summary of previous findings, and a call to arms!

The articles began by illustrating clearly the National, and State by State figures for the years 2001-2016. In a couple of instances membership is heading in the right direction. In others – not so!

Look to the Future:

If you are in a club or association that seems satisfied with current membership trends, be aware that just relying on the hard core of members for your club to survive is not enough. If you retain 95% of members without adding new ones each year, you will have lost more than one third by Year 8. If you retain 90% per year, you will have lost 30% plus by Year 4.

In successive articles research findings of what works for clubs were presented, and several examples of successful programs currently being used that have proven to be successful were cited. Has your club taken up any of these ideas and given them a try?

Develop a Positive Club Culture:

The issue of retaining members has also been look at, again with practical suggestions for clubs to engage existing and new members. Remember, there's no point in getting people through the front door if the back door is wide open. New members drift away through lack of follow-up of visitors. How many clubs listen to new members? Does your club have a mechanism for feedback from members? Do State Associations or clubs actually evaluate how they are running? Does yours?

Broaden Your Horizons:

Proactive clubs that offer a diverse range of disciplines are seen to be thriving. Those that sit back and wait for members to appear on the range, and then hope they come back, don't. Simple, really.

The 'good old days' of cheap ammo and cheap basic equipment have gone. The reality is that the old style shooter is being replaced with a group who are more

demanding – typically one who wants to embrace one of the F Class disciplines or else are Field or Service enthusiasts.

Can your club cope with and cater for this ‘new’ shooter? Does it? Previous articles have advocated opening up our sport more to Field and Service enthusiasts. There are a great many of them out there – all are prospective new members. Associations and clubs need to embrace change. Try having different disciplines on alternating weeks if mid-week shooting is not viable. Think outside the box.

Remember the power of advertising and public exposure of your club’s activities via the local media. Does your club have a Publicity Officer? Determine to market your club and the sport better.

Co-operative Clubs:

You can keep your club healthy and vibrant by being personally involved. Research shows that where job rosters operate people are more inclined to enjoy the club’s activities, take ownership and bring new members. Alternatively, if a club relies on the usual 5% of members to run the club and therefore have to turn up to everything, it runs the real risk of them becoming disillusioned or tired out, or sick of criticism. Everyone needs to step up and take some responsibility for the running of the club. Being a participating member has enormous rewards.

Membership fees are currently due and within a few weeks the numbers will be in. Whether or not this series of articles have made any difference will be evident. Hopefully, when the next set of graphs is completed, there will be a positive result.

Finally: a Parable.

In the 9th Century in northern China, a heavy and valuable bronze bell sank into a river during transport. Engineers’ efforts to raise it failed due to its weight. Several years later, a priest named Lu Mei Shujen sought permission to raise the bell, with the proviso that if successful the bell would reside in a local temple.

Given permission, Lu Mei Shujen instructed his assistants to cut and gather an immense number of bamboo rods. These are hollow, light and practically unsinkable. These rods were taken down to the bell by divers and one by one attached to the bell.

After many thousands of rods had been attached the bell slowly began to shift, then move due to the accumulated buoyancy of the bamboo rods. The bell was floated, then retrieved and placed in the local temple.

The point being, that each individual rod had an imperceptible impact, but in the final scheme of things, each rod’s efforts, working with the others, collectively made a difference and a positive result.

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