

Membership **Newsletter**

Issue 1

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Clubs Motoring Organisations Conservation Charities Guilds of Craftsmen
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What will the New Government mean to you?

The election is over and we have a new coalition government. So what will this mean for you? In reality it seems very unlikely that the new broom will make sweeping changes. There are some philosophical differences between the parties, which no doubt will be translated into legislation over the coming parliament. But the real challenge that lies ahead for the membership organisation is, I believe, the perilous state of the country's finances.

Without wishing to sound too alarmist, it seems inevitable that we are in for a rough ride over the next few years whilst the government grapples with the burden of reducing the national debt.

The most obvious problem is simply that the person in the street will have less disposable income as the unavoidable personal tax increases start to bite. Furthermore, there are strong rumours that VAT will increase and, of course, charities stand to lose the 3% transitional relief on Gift Aid in 2011.

All a bit gloomy but don't despair! It may be your natural reaction to retrench and ride out the storm by cutting activity and reducing expenditure but I would urge you not to do this. Instead use this difficult time to review your membership strategy and resolve to swim against the tide by increasing your membership.

In a very modest way we hope that this Newsletter, which will be published four times a year, will help by spurring you into action and giving you some useful tips along the way.

How to reverse a trend in declining membership

I have been working with membership organisations for over 25 years and I think I have seen it all - the good, the bad and the ugly! Certainly in 21st Century Britain there are many membership bodies that are run superbly well by using sophisticated database marketing techniques. Sadly, this is not always the case and in my experience, bureaucracy and administration all too often overwhelm hard working and committed staff.

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- What will the new Government mean to you
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- Top Tip!

We specialise in membership marketing and administration and have decades of experience behind us with some of the largest and most prestigious membership organisations in the UK.

If you want to share a coffee and have an informal chat about how we may be able to help you swim against the tide please contact us.



I have met harassed CEO's pulling their hair out in exasperation. Membership is dwindling, costs are rising and there is no money available for investment. A sorry and all too common tale of woe! However, unless some cataclysmic event has removed the proverbial rug from beneath your feet, you have every chance of turning things around.

There may be no universal panacea that will instantly transform the fortunes of an ailing membership organisation but there are fairly simple steps that can make a huge difference! Perhaps, if Mr Micawber had been a membership manager he may have said: "Annual new member recruitment 20, annual member attrition 19, result happiness. Annual new member recruitment 20, annual member attrition 21, result misery."

...continued overleaf

To keep Mr Micawber happy I would recommend that he put in place measures to decrease member attrition and a programme to recruit new members at the top of this agenda every single year. It sounds obvious but I wonder how many membership organisations lose sight of the 'obvious' in their daily toil. I have come up with my top ten tips on how to turn around a declining membership:

- 1 Upgrade subscription renewals and reminders so that they are logical, easy to complete and promote the benefits of membership
- 2 Promote direct debit
- 3 Always look for member feedback through questionnaires, surveys and face-to-face meetings and refine your membership offering accordingly
- 4 Stop being overly influenced by the complaints of the vociferous few. Be analytical
- 5 Build a member profile which can be used to drive a recruitment programme
- 6 Devise and implement a membership recruitment strategy and ensure campaign results are carefully analysed
- 7 Systematically communicate with lapsed members
- 8 Prioritise converting 'enquirers' into members. Upgrade & personalise enquiry pack
- 9 Ensure your database is designed /configured to record and report on the above easily and cheaply
- 10 Use your past performance statistics to be the main driver of your retention and recruitment strategy

More than once I have had involvement with membership organisations, apparently in terminal decline and used the above as a blueprint for change. It is perfectly feasible to reverse a downward trend in membership numbers within months.

Good luck to you all! To arrange a free consultation contact Andrew Atiyah on 01293 773221 or email membership@computastat-group.co.uk

Your Questions Answered

I have a lapsed member file going back four years that I would like to mail. I am concerned about the accuracy of the data but have found the costs of data cleaning prohibitive. Have you any suggestions? Graham Footer, CEO Mobilise Organisation

Data cleaning can be expensive because you are paying a royalty per 'hit' in many instances. So the older and less accurate your data the more expensive it is to clean. I would recommend that you look into doing a 'partial' clean whereby you just run your file against PAFF to clean addresses, the Bereavement Register and Mortascreen to remove the deceased and the NCOA to identify the new addresses of those who have moved. By doing this you will still get plenty of undeliverable mail back but you will have improved your data in the critical areas without spending a fortune.

Just over 50% percent of my members pay by Direct Debit and I wondered how this compared with other membership organisations? Simon Bibb, Membership Manager Royal Photographic Society

Assuming we are talking of 'lay' membership rather than business or professional you will, in my experience, be doing very well if you can hit 70% of members renewing by direct debit. (I would be interested to be proved wrong here so please let me know your experiences!) But always keep plugging away as DD has a great effect on member retention rates.

Ramblings of an Old Stager

Taking advantage of digital technology

When I think back to my first exposure to the Charity sector, in the early 1980's I realise just how far the sector has come. Of course, the world in which we live and breath, has undergone a digital revolution that has touched every aspect of our working lives. For those who have grown up with mobile phones, laptops and the Internet it must be hard to imagine a life without them. Indeed, for us 'oldies' who can remember, it is sometimes hard to believe that only thirty years ago we inhabited a world where every donor and member had their details recorded on a hand written record card and all appeals and member correspondence came from a typewriter!

I can remember vividly the excitement when we were introduced to the wonders of Alan Sugar's Amstrad word processor! It was truly a magical moment in my life as I become aware of the implications of the new digital world. Almost overnight a digital industry had sprung up accompanied by a new language describing the changing environment; direct marketing, database management, member profiling and personalisation are just a few concepts which just did not exist until the onset of computerisation.

You may well wonder where I am going with this and perhaps you rightly conclude that it's just the meaningless ramblings of an old stager! Well, maybe you are right (!) but actually I was thinking that, with all the undoubted advantages that technology has brought with it, there is still some way to go for most membership organisations to fully exploit the potential of the digital age.

Clearly all membership organisations and donor-based charities send personalised subscription renewals, appeals and other correspondence to their members and donors and more often than not, these communications are personalised and professional. But surprisingly few of these organisations have an accurate profile of their members. In the difficult economic conditions that we now face it is more important than ever to have a genuine understanding of the motivations and aspirations of your members.

The next ten years

If I look into my crystal ball I see that the most successful membership organisations of the next decade are those, which have developed accurate member profiles and a supporting personalised communications programme. In simple terms this means getting to know your members as individuals and then communicating with them at this level. For example, Mrs Wiggins may have supported a Fauna Conservation charity all her life but her real passion, which she has held since childhood, is Dolphins. So rather than sending appeals and membership communications describing the demise of the spotted sand lizard of Sub-Saharan Africa why not talk to Mrs Wiggins about her Dolphins?

Collecting, storing, maintaining and using accurate member data is a serious challenge for all membership organisations. And I believe, if you have serious ambitions to grow your membership in these challenging times developing a more personalised approach to membership should be on your agenda.

Making words count

Everyone involved in membership recruitment, retention and renewal knows just how challenging it can be – especially in these financially testing times. This is particularly so if membership derived income is a mainstay of your organisation.

When, how and what you communicate to your potential, existing and lapsed members is crucial to your continued success. Inevitably a number of factors are involved – the quality and depth of your database information, competitive pressures, attractive membership packages/incentives, timing, budgets and, of course, what members themselves expect you to do or provide. Ultimately, however, **the success or otherwise of your communications will largely come down to what you say to your members and how you say it.**

Copywriting for membership audiences is a specialist skill, even if many of the ‘golden rules’ may seem obvious. Done well, **good copy can and should make a significant difference to your results**, whether in terms of recruitment and renewal, or just keeping your members happy and informed.

A reflection of your core values

Crucially, the copy must reflect the core values of your organisation. This means that the copy tone, style and language should reinforce in readers’ minds the reasons why they identify with your organisation.

It’s also vitally important that the benefits of membership are clearly stated up-front in any membership recruitment/renewal programme. Even long-term members need reminding of the value of their membership and the reasons that first attracted them to you. It’s surprising how many organisations often fail to do this and take it for granted.

Get personal

In today’s world, copy that generally works best is friendly and approachable, using ‘we’ and ‘you’ to engage with the member. However, chatty copy or a too informal approach can run the risk of devaluing the communication and thereby the organisation. And never waffle! Audiences like to receive information in bite-size chunks with clear signposts (headlines, subheads, highlighted text etc) and short sentences and paragraphs. The skill is to be crisp, direct and impactful whilst still appearing warm and friendly.

The more personal the approach, the better the results or feelings of being involved that are engendered. After all, **your members need to feel valued and that their membership is helping in some way** - whether that’s in terms of making a difference to a global cause or ensuring the continued provision of specialist services/information/benefits and so on.



Say something new

Wherever possible, try to say something new, even if it’s just to highlight the launch of a blog on your website or something similar. This shows your organisation is continually refreshing itself, is up-to-date and proactive in finding new ways to engage with members and enhance the whole membership experience.

We’re not going to give away all the copywriting techniques here, but hopefully this gives you an idea of how good copy can play a major role in helping your organisation to gain the greatest benefits from your membership programme.

It’s also one of the reasons why we at Computastat have helped organisations of all shapes and sizes **to maximise their membership income, significantly increase their recruitment and renewal success rates and run innovative programmes that foster long-term relationships which benefit both members and organisations alike.**

Why not find out more about how our copywriting and other services could benefit your organisation by contacting us today?

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Focus on **Charities**

Gift Aid

According to the Charities Aid Foundation the charity sector is currently missing out on over £700 million each year in unclaimed tax relief. This is a staggering sum by any measure and is only likely to rise.

With difficult economic conditions ahead, today may be the time to check out if your organisation could claw back some welcome cash from HMRC. Our experience suggests that many charities (dare I say most!) do not have a systematic approach to collecting Gift Aid from previous years, particularly from lapsed members and past donors.

It should be a relatively easy process to identify all membership subscription and donations eligible for Gift Aid from the last four years that do not have a corresponding Gift Aid declaration. If this figure is in excess of £50,000 I would suggest you seriously consider a Gift Aid mailing (or phone campaign as appropriate).

Over the last twelve months or so, I have worked with a number of membership organisations and completed this exercise and in the process released hundreds of thousands of pounds of very welcome and usually unexpected cash!

Top Tip

Many of the membership organisations with which I have worked with over the years have, what I would describe as a hit and miss approach to contacting lapsed members. Every so often, when the wind is blowing from the west and the budgets are underspent, lapsed members may be mailed!

Often these very same organisations are spending a small fortune on recruiting new members! In most cases re-activating lapsed members gives a far better return on investment than cold recruitment. My top tip is build in a **process driven** lapsed member communication into your renewal programme preferably with some sort of extra incentive (such as 15 months for the price of 12).

Our Services

- Design, print & mailing (including storage and distribution)
- Subscription Renewals & Reminders (full bureau service)
- Enquirer's Packs
- Welcome Packs
- Questionnaires & Surveys
- Lapsed Member Reactivation & Telephone Campaigns
- Membership Cards
- Fundraising Consultancy & Appeal Mailings
- Legacy Marketing
- Data Cleaning & profiling
- Database Development
- Gift Aid Auditing & Promotion
- Online Print Ordering & Management
- Administration & Support Services
- Response Handling & Fulfilment
- Magazines & Newsletters
- Promotional Leaflets & Brochures

The Computastat Group specialise in membership marketing. Our focus is to help our clients to increase membership and improve on their return on investment. We have 20 years of experience working with some of the largest and most successful membership organisations in the UK as well as many smaller institutions, associations and charities.

Membership Audit

Why not take advantage of a *free of charge* Computastat Group membership audit ?

During a membership audit we analyse your membership communications processes, which covers renewals, lapsed members, enquiry handling, recruitment, Gift Aid and more. Our focus is to offer guidance and advice to help you increase your membership. Following an audit we will provide you with a written report of our findings and recommendations all FOC.

For a free consultation please contact Andrew Atiyah, on 01293 773221 or email membership@computastat-group.co.uk

Written by:

Andrew Atiyah – With a background in finance, marketing and general management and over 25 years experience of working with the not-for-profit / membership arena Andrew focuses his attention on helping clients improve their ROI. With an in-depth understanding of database marketing techniques Andrew has written and run training programmes and seminars on membership and related subjects.

Nick Pease – Communications and copywriting: Nick is a highly experienced, award-winning copywriter who has worked for some of the most creative and successful London agencies (McCann-Erickson, TBWA, Publicis, The Creative Business). Over the years Nick has worked in every business sector and every medium, from television and radio through to direct marketing, B2B and online. Within Nick's experience he has worked with a number of membership-based organisations, including Amnesty International, Greenpeace, RNLI and The Royal Photographic Society.

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