

Know your audience – engage your members

The BGA can help with the national effort, but clubs are best placed to promote themselves locally and attract new members.

The BGA carries out marketing and promotion activity to support clubs efforts to encourage participation and grow club membership.

The BGA Marketing Officer is Rachel Edwards. Please contact Rachel via the BGA office.

Top tip – don't forget that each BGA club can edit its own section of the BGA website, add/remove photographs, upload details of club courses and other opportunities, and update contact details.

Attracting New Members

The BGA can help with the national effort, but clubs are best placed to promote themselves locally and attract new members....

Use existing members

Club members (particularly if they are new) can be great ambassadors – as long as they are satisfied members!

The importance of attracting new members needs to be regularly communicated to the club membership. It's amazing how many club members are mistakenly under the illusion that their club has a healthy membership when in reality, it's a different story. Don't paint a picture of doom and gloom, but do communicate clear objectives and benefits when seeking club member buy-in to the clubs recruitment efforts.

Local community

The local community can provide a wealth of potential new member prospects. It takes quite a bit of effort, time and commitment to build up relationships in these areas. A club may have members who can help with local community marketing.

What to offer

All activities and businesses are discovering that their potential audience is becoming increasingly segmented and they have to offer different variations of their products or services in order to meet

demand and compete. In order to give the club every opportunity of appealing to a wide audience, it is important to give careful thought to exactly what is being offered to particular groups of people. 'A flight in a glider with a carefully trained instructor' will appeal to some, while in other cases a far more adventurous approach may be appropriate! For others, the appeal will be an opportunity to spend time in the fresh air with colleagues doing something different. It's worth thinking about before spending money on advertising resources.

Retaining Existing Members

'The simple answer to improve membership retention is to provide more value and engage members' – Tony Rossell, 'Membership Lifecycle'

The BGA supports clubs efforts to retain their members by

- Removing barriers to participation
- Motivating, coaching, encouraging, and recognising achievement
- Marketing opportunities at clubs and elsewhere

But the real work on retention has to take place at clubs. And maintaining current membership levels has never been harder for most gliding clubs.

Good news!

But there is good news. Overall membership of gliding clubs has levelled off and some clubs are experiencing growth. There is no shortage of interest in gliding – which means there is no shortage of potential customers who want trial lessons or introductory flights!

However, what is changing is the way that people are choosing to participate. For example, although joining a club is a necessity, getting *involved* in a club is no longer high on the agenda for many people who just want to turn up and do their thing. That said, many do want to get involved. It's a challenge meeting the needs of all members!

In order to attract and keep new members, it is vital that a club understands what the members want. They are the club's most valuable asset and a healthy membership base that actively uses the club and its facilities should be at the core of any successful gliding club.

What clubs need to know about their members

The old adage that 20% of your customers are responsible for 80% of your business is equally true within gliding clubs. Every club has a core membership which flies regularly, supports club events, attends social occasions, and uses the bar. They would almost certainly amount to around 20% of a club's member base.

Most gliding clubs know little if anything about their membership and much of their decision-making is based on anecdotal evidence rather than hard facts.

By finding out more about the existing membership a club can not only improve its offering, provide more of the same and generate more income, but can also find and target potential new members with a similar profile to the club's existing best customers. There are 3 key things clubs MUST know about their members:

1. Who they are

This includes their name, address, contact details and also their age, marital status, family, occupation. This legally obtained and carefully stored detail will help their club help them get the most from their membership. Why occupation? You otherwise may never know what useful, hidden talents lurk among the gliding club membership.

2. Their (gliding) habits

Clubs should have a record of who flies what and when, and for how long. And perhaps any courses and expeditions attended.

3. What they spend

This may seem mercenary, but do members use the bar, or club catering facilities, and do they make the most of paid flying opportunities? If not, then why not? If they do, it's important to know why – what motivates them?

It is vital that clubs have ways and processes to collect this data as it is the most valuable information they can lay their hands on. This can be as simple as using an Excel Spreadsheet or Microsoft Project. But it needs to be accessible so it can be regularly updated.

Communication - it's a two-way thing

How can a club meet its members' needs if it doesn't understand what its members want or need? A member survey once a year is a great way of communicating with club members. The key to any survey is to

understand what it is trying to find out. It may be about a specific difficult area, it may be a general survey, or it could be a new member survey. Surveys only work if they are conducted reasonably regularly and the members receive feedback – on both the results and the next steps ie. what the club plans to do. Incentivising surveys always improves response rates.

There are many ways of communicating directly with members. Email communication is very effective providing the emails are well written and concise! Communication with members needs to be consistent. Some clubs launch a monthly newsletter and after a few issues the whole idea tails away. The same applies to the club news section on the website or Facebook page which is fervently updated for the first few weeks and then again, the novelty wears off and it falls down the 'to do' list. Sporadic communication is almost as bad as not communicating at all.

A secret to successful communication is to make someone responsible for it.

A simple communication plan such as weekly update of the website, a monthly newsletter and email, a regular 'what's coming' info poster.....the ideas are numerous but the key is to commit to them and make sure they happen.

Using membership information

Once a club has found out more about its members ([don't forget the need to protect data](#)) and committed to a regular communication campaign, it is important to make sure that the messages that are communicated are right for each group of members.

There are the obvious groups of members – eg instructors and juniors – but remember too that there are members who haven't been to the airfield for months, members who used to attend social events but haven't done so for months...and so on. It doesn't need to be complicated and it's surprising what can be achieved with relevant, targeted information.

And at the end of the day, having identified a member who is 'at risk' of dropping out, it may just take a willingness to make verbal contact and a friendly, sympathetic phone call to keep hold of another valued member.

Good luck! The effort will be worthwhile.