

As a small club it's vital that people know about you and your brand. The more people you reach, the more participants you will attract. Simple! You could be the greatest fencing coach in the world but if you fail to market your club and customers don't know about you, how do you engage them in your sessions and increase your membership?

That's why marketing is such a valuable tool for clubs. However, it's essential that you get your marketing strategy right. Don't blow your whole budget on one channel: you need to make sure the marketing reaches a wide yet targeted audience.

Another point to keep in mind when marketing is that the innovative methods are always the best. Take the route less travelled and make your club stand out from the crowd. Try these ideas:

1. Write a press release

Send out a press release detailing your club proposition and what makes it unique from other sports clubs in the area. Target all relevant newspapers, websites, magazines and radio. Do this even if you think your offer isn't the most exciting. It could be a slow news day and you might be exactly what they're looking for.

2. Use Twitter

Set up a Twitter account for your club. You need to make people aware of you, your classes and your offers. Tweet your whereabouts – tell people where you are and what you are doing. Twitter's also a fantastic way to spread discounts and offers: tweet out every time you're offering a bargain or a new session. Get your existing members to follow you on Twitter and to re-you're your messages. Tweet regularly enough and pretty soon you'll have an army of followers, or as they're known in the club world, potential members!

3. Use Facebook

Set up a Facebook page for your club. Upload photos and videos of your classes and update your status to let members know what you're up to. It's another way of letting people know you exist and makes you look professional.

4. Set up a website

For a club to be successful today it's essential that you have a website. The first thing a potential member will do when trying to find out about your club is Google it. An attractive website can make your club look ultra professional and should be the home of your online presence. Your social media channels should link back to your website as much as they can. This will help drive traffic to your site and is another way of creating sales.

5. Start a blog

This is a fast way to keep your website relevant. It could also encourage people to spend longer on your website and will encourage repeat visitors. You should style yourself as an expert on your particular field or industry. It's the perfect way to enforce brand messages and engage with customers. If people read and like your posts, they'll respect your brand even more.

6. Email marketing

Email lets you communicate with your members or potential members at the touch of a button. And, for smaller mailing lists, it's usually free! Get customers to fill in a form with their email address on it whenever they have contact with you and have a 'Sign up for more information' field on your 'Contact us' page. This will help you build a list of email addresses to contact whenever you have a new product or offer.

7. Convert your members into promoters

Potential members are a million times more likely to use your club if it's been recommended by a friend. So why not turn your members into brand ambassadors? Give them a discount on products if someone they recommended joins a class. That way they'll be singing your praises and getting you more members in the process.

8. Turn your members into fans

People are attracted to happy people, so make your classes, lessons and offers - even yourself- so positive that members can't wait to tell their friends and colleagues about it.

9. Offer a discount card

It's a great way to reward members for their loyalty and persuade them to keep using your club. For example, 'buy 9 lessons, get the tenth one free'. In order to get the free one, the member may buy more than he originally intended. This tactic is a favourite of major companies such as Starbucks and McDonalds.

10. Get happy members to tell you

Encourage members to write a short email or letter about the positive experience they had when using your club. Put these testimonials on your website and maybe frame some exceptional ones in your salle. People will be more willing to use you if they see that other customers have had a positive experience.

11. Run a competition

Give something away and get people talking about your club. You could run a competition and advertise it online. This could get more people visiting your classes: more people will see your awesome lessons and ultimately join.

12. Offer to write for a trade magazine or website

Often the club coach is the CEO, financial director and marketing expert of the club. That makes them experts in every aspect of running their venture. So offer to write a blog on your club for a trade publication. It's another way of getting your club known and makes you look even more reputable.

13. Try and win an award

Entering for an industry award can be easy. For some, all you need to do is write an application. If you're successful, local press may be interested in speaking to you and it's another accolade to put on your website or club card. It also gives members confidence in your club.

14. Form a partnership with your Regional Hub

For small clubs the regional hub network can be a godsend. Joining with other clubs means that you will have access to their network of expertise. You can also pool contacts and share advice. Want an example?

15. Help out a local charity

Help organise a fundraising event or give 5% of your club earnings from a particular session or campaign to charity. It will win your club brownie points in the local community and may even get some coverage in the press.

16. Ask experts to write on your website

Just like you, thousands of other clubs and people are looking to market themselves. If they're relevant, why not allow them to write a comment piece and post it on your website? Regular updates help your website to climb the Google rankings and guest posts are great link bait: your blogger will tell everyone they know to read it!

17. Get on YouTube

Have a YouTube page where you can put videos of your club. If you're a coach, official or volunteer, film yourself and your members. If done well, it can show potential members that you really care about what you're creating at your club. It also gives existing members and stakeholders an opportunity to see how much effort goes into running a great club or event. The same can be done for people who make the tea and sandwiches, the spectators and fencers.

18. Make a memorable club card

Club cards are cheap to make and a great way of ensuring people remember your club. When you meet potential members at an event, give them your club card. If it's fun and memorable they may show it to friends. Effectively they're marketing your club for you.

How to Write a Press Release or Press Release Writing Tips

Introduction

Here is some information to assist you in writing a good press release. A well written press release can capture the attention of journalists and get you good exposure.

You are writing for journalists

Press releases aren't for customers or consumers they are for reporters, journalists who will use them as a starting point for a larger story or feature. Write your story as you would like to have it told. Press releases written as sales pieces will be completely ignored. The points you make in your press release and the order in which you make them may direct the journalist in how to develop the story.

Start with a strong "lead"

The first paragraph of the press release is known as the "lead". The lead needs to be strong, communicating your message quickly and concisely. You need to use your headline and first paragraph effectively so that they stand alone and that if only those portions were to be read, there would be enough information to understand what the release is about. The rest of your press release should provide the detail. Journalists see maybe thousands of press releases a day, you have a few seconds to grab your their attention.

What is your angle?

The media are always on the look out for a good story. Your press release needs to be more than just fact, it needs to be newsworthy. Understanding why journalists would find your story interesting is the key to success. Think about the release from the journalist's point of view, put yourself in their shoes. It is best to make your press release timely and to tie it to current events or social issues if possible. Find a good angle, a good news hook and you have the start of a good press release.

Who, what, where, when and why

A good press release needs to answer all of the "W" questions (who, what, where, when and why), providing the journalist with useful information about your organization, product, service or event. If your press release reads like an advertisement or sales pitch, dump it.

Why should anyone care?

Company launches, new websites and changes of management happen all the time and so aren't interesting. You need to concentrate on what makes your new company, web site, CEO or product unique. Ask yourself the question, "Why should anyone care?" Concentrate on the aspects of your press release that makes it different.

Add the human touch

Always use real life stories about how your organization identified a problem and solved it. How did your service or product fulfil a need or help the community. Real life examples communicate the benefits of using your product or service in a powerful way.

Keep to the point

Use enough words to tell your story, no more and no less. Don't pad your release with unnecessary adjectives or flowery language. But at the same time make each word count.

Limit the jargon

The best way to communicate your news is to speak plainly. You may need to use some jargon or industry specific lingo, but limit it to the minimum. Industry specific terms are only understood by people in the same industry where as your press release is aimed at a general readership.