

**Marketing the Club**  
**Discussion Summary**  
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**I. Overview**

This document summarizes an email discussion held primarily between Harvey Reed Marketing Director and Jim Todhunter, Board member.

**II. The Discussion**

**Harvey Reed, Friday 2004-12-31**

All,

Here are some factors I've been mulling around:

1. We have been blessed (with the exception of this fall) with steady or increasing attendance and membership since our move to Natick.
2. We have never (with one forgettable exception) done outreach to our existing base in the form of a mailing to people's homes
3. We have unfortunately alienated some families with the "team" thing, which I think we straightened out last night.
4. We have no means to remind people of what a great resource MetroWest CC is
5. Etc, etc

From a month to month perspective, we have a decent routine:

6. Improved on-time performance
7. Regular newsletter, on-time delivery except for December
8. Poster boards showing what happened
9. Immediate pay out of prize money

Yet, I haven't been able to figure out how to get people thinking about the "larger cycle" or rhythm of the Club. We need to get people thinking in terms of annual cycles to get people excited about the Club and Class Ch, Anniversary, etc. I'm not talking about "variety"; we have that as section breaks, and other subtle features. These replaced the Framingham CC features of different length tournaments.

Also, you can't be intense all the time, there needs to be an ebb and flow, and it has to have a feel of consistency throughout the Club. Here is a proposal:

10. We formalize into our schedule the notion of "special months". For example –
  - a. Championship month (Club and Class) – MARCH/APRIL
  - b. Anniversary month (celebration for active members) – MAY
  - c. Memorial month (remembrance of dearly departed members) – NOVEMBER
11. We have special fanfare and promotion around these months
12. We use these occasions to recruit regular members to volunteer (note: It's hard to recruit people when everything always seems to run fairly well. Having "special events" is a way to expose people to chipping in, the fact that it's fun, and not too hard. After the special events, we can ask them if they want to help in a more functional role like the library)
13. We use a different "marketing channel" to cue the member into this rhythm and encourage participation. As good as the newsletter is, it can't transcend being a monthly reporting mechanism.
14. We can consider a paper mailing to do the job.

Specifics (we can always scale down but here is max) – Have a mailing 2 times per year:

- Jan 2005 – Year in review
  - Any special changes?
    - More friendly for family teams! □ KEY item
  - Annual yearbook of what happened so far
    - Who are our current Champions?
    - Who is in the running for this year?
  - Preview of Anniversary
    - Member games contest?
    - Other?
  - High level calendar for year
    - Overall Monthly
    - Overall Scholastic
    - Championship
    - Anniversary
    - Memorial
- August 2005 – Mid year refresh
  - Results of Championship
  - Anniversary report
  - Preview of Fall
  - Reminder of Memorial

By doing these two mailings we reach out to current and lapsed players. We can probably bring a fair number of them back to the Club and easily recoup our costs. Thumbnail estimate: 300 people X \$0.75 each mailing X 2 issues == \$450 == 30 entries @ \$15 each (2.5 entries per month)

Ideas, comments? BTW, I am willing to do the bulk of the work. If we want to do this, we need to pull the trigger now.

**Jim Todhunter, Saturday, 2005-01-01**

Hi Harvey,

This is a very interesting topic. Outreach is a good thing, but it also raises a number of questions. Typically, it is very hard to do double-duty with a single campaign. So, the first question to ask is what is the strategic intent of the campaign: active member retention, new member recruitment, or lapsed member recovery?

From the discussion below, it seems that the proposal is around retention and recovery. Is that correct? So in the interest of helping advance the discussion, here are some observations.

In general, I think your idea to improve communications is a great one, and if done well should be able to achieve several of the goals you outline. As a vehicle to help with retention, build the sense of club community, generate enthusiasm around the club calendar cycle, and stimulate broader involvement the high-level outline given is very good. This could work very well if the target audience is currently active members.

For this audience, I am wondering what our coverage of the membership would be via e-mail distribution versus ground mail. If the coverage was substantial, I would question the merit of a direct mail campaign. It would seem an unnecessary expense if we can get the bulk of the benefit through electronic distribution.

Concerning the timing of the mailings, the schedule mentioned seems loaded in the winter months. If we want to both stimulate participation in key events and also recognize that people respond better to an up-and-down rhythm, then spreading the events around better might be advised. For example, Club/class championships in March/April – Member appreciation event in July (taking the liberty of moving the anniversary month for the benefit of smoothing the calendar) – and the Stanley Crowe Memorial in November; with the mailings in January, May, and September.

It is also mentioned that the monthly newsletter can't transcend being a reporting mechanism. I am not sure I see why this is true. I think it could be quite effective if in the key communication months the newsletter had an expanded format, and in the off months it was an abbreviated format.

Now as to reactivating lapsed members, I have doubts that a simple newsletter will have the pull that has been projected. Typically, direct mail response rates are very, very poor. Many pieces are tossed without being read, and without a specific call to action the reader has no reason to follow-up. If we want to try and reactivate old members, we might want to consider different type of campaign entirely. For example, a targeted mailing just to people who haven't been to the club in the past 12 months in October promoting the Memorial event along with a coupon offering a discount on the entry. This would probably be more effective at bringing in such lapsed members.

And of course, the discussion would not be complete without the mention of attracting new members. I am sorry I could not be at the recent board meeting to support your motion for the TLA. In the past when I was a tournament organizer, I found the TLA to be a very effective means of attracting new and occasional entrants for my events.

I hope this has not been too rambling. I look forward to seeing your thoughts and discussing this further.

### **Harvey Reed, Sunday, 2005-01-01**

Jim,

As usual, you have very good commentary.

15. Yes, this is for retention and reactivation, not general recruitment, so...
16. I am hoping that a simple call to action (on the outside of the mailer) would entice them to open it
17. Yes, it is not intended for "regulars" so the address list would be for "lapsed" people/families (much less than 300 pieces, that was worst cast financials)
18. I think the reason the email newsletter may not be sufficient for this type of "call to action" is that my informal polling suggests people read it for results and regular monthly happenings, but not much more. They know it's there every month, so there is no urgency to read it in any particular month.
19. The premise (which can certainly be proven wrong) is that a piece of MetroWest Chess Club branded paper mail arriving at a former players home is unusual enough to prompt at least a light reading.
20. This could be a one-time thing
21. We could do more than one, in which case your comments about timing are valid, and we should discuss

Your turn...

### **Jim Todhunter, Monday, 2005-01-03**

Hi Harvey,

Ok, this is intended to target "non-regulars". In that case, I am not sure the goal will be met with the current approach. I suggest this because audiences tend to be self-selecting. It can be assumed the non-regulars are aware of the club's existence already. Sending them a mailing will certainly get the club in front of them for an instant, but it is unlikely to get them to get off the couch to come play. Why do I say this? Simply put, because our "product" is good chess, efficiently delivered. Yes, there is a segment of the club population that will respond to the broader themes in the mailing about the community of the club, but I suspect that as a tool to get lapsed members re-interested, these messages are unlikely to resonate.

This is why I was referring to the need for a call-to-action in a lapse member campaign. The call-to-action isn't "read this mailing." The call to action must be a call to act on a compelling reason to come to the club that is presented in the mailing, or to take some other action response to the mailing. Only in this way will such a mailing have a chance of success.

Of course, this also leads to the question of what is the definition of success. If success is defined as "someone we haven't seen in long time shows up at the club," there is a reasonable chance that this standard of success will be met.

However if we add to the definition of success the notion that the campaign should be at worst financially net-neutral, this is a tougher situation. For example if we use the estimated cost of the two mailings cited (\$450), we must understand that this would require that roughly 90 people return to play in club events. (This is based on the assertion that since we target about 75% of entry fees to be returned as prizes, that only \$5 per entry for a four round event is available as an offset against the campaign.) 90 persons would represent a mailing response rate of 30%--absolutely unheard of in mailing campaigns. True, if we get people earlier in the year and they attend multiple events, this helps, but a rosy project still doesn't look too likely. Even if we assume that people who return average 3 events during the year, that is still a response rate of 10%, many times the expected response rates for even the most well targeted of mailing campaigns.

I think that we need to find a more cost efficient way to go after the non-regulars.

I think if we wanted to target regulars, the proposed mailing would get more response and be more effective. However, it would also tend to generate very little offsetting entry fees since these people are already likely to attend with out the mailing. For this audience, it still feels like an e-mail campaign would be best.

Perhaps, an interesting question is how do we repurpose the current newsletter? As you note, there is a current expectation of what the newsletter is and hence established patterns of readership. However, these expectations and patterned could be reset.

I don't mean to sound negative, but direct mailing is notorious ineffective and relies on the right economies of scale to work.

Does any of this make sense? What do you think?

**Harvey Reed, Monday, 2005-01-10**

James,

Yes direct mailing is awful for % return. I'm grasping for something that is different, and will remind the lapsed person "ooh chess is fun, I haven't been in a while, maybe I'll try next month"

Yes the newsletter has settled into a format that is easy to produce (now) and is consistent so people can easily read it in a few minutes and stay in touch. But can it easily be repurposed? I don't know.

Yes, a special event is enticing too, I've been talking with Randi (bookseller) about getting Irina Krush or Shahade or someone for a special Anniversary event. That might be worth a mailing or equivalent.

Could also be expensive for the Club, or in entry fee.

I want to keep this discussion going. Simply put --

?? How do we reach out to the "lapsed" without disturbing the "regular" ??

And none of this addresses lead generation for new people which we have never done except for web presence, yellow pages, and flyers at the library.