



Sharing success

Membership drive

Rationale

In January 2008 Marple Civic Society had a membership of 65 in a town with a population of approximately 26000. The membership profile was one of long standing membership and, due in part to advancing years, becoming less active in the Society.

As the new Chairman I could see that the Society would disappear if action was not taken to increase membership. Increased membership would make the Society more representative of the community that it was seeking to serve and increase the Society's influence. Also, it was thought that perhaps the Society should seek to attract residents who would not in the past have identified with the Civic Society.

Method

Once the Committee had agreed the proposal for a membership drive (and the estimated costs), a sub committee was set up to manage the project.

Preparation started in June although we had discussed the idea informally for several months beforehand. October/ November was set as the target date for our campaign.

We decided that a personalised approach should be adopted. Unsolicited mail finds its way into the dustbin very quickly usually without even being opened. We decided to target approximately 750 homes in Marple where we would send a personal letter from a committee member inviting the resident to join us. Each committee member was invited to send approximately 50 membership packs out to friends and neighbours. Each pack would contain a letter, a publicity leaflet, membership form and return envelope (not stamped). Committee members would have their own address on the letter and were expected to hand write the name and address of the recipient.

Not everyone knew 50 friends and neighbours that they could write to so the Society purchased a copy of the electoral register so that we could allocate different areas to each committee member.

We needed a new publicity leaflet anyway so we decided to design a new one for the membership drive. To add interest to the leaflet we asked a local artist to paint a "Building of Significance" in Marple which we used on the front of the leaflet. Payment was life membership of the Society. By Christmas 2008 almost 800 packs had been delivered and we anxiously awaited the results of our labours.

Results

We had hoped to grow the Society to 250 to 300 members. In the event we reached 150 by the end of January 2009 with a trickle of new applications still coming in.

To welcome the new members I sent a personal (but standardised) letter to each new member. A small colour copy of the painting by our new artist member was included in each welcome pack.

The Future

Having done the preparatory work we may repeat the process later in the year. We now have a new membership leaflet, a copy of the Electoral register and, most important of all, the experience and knowledge that it works.

Benefits

Coincidentally, at the same time as we were conducting our membership drive we were campaigning against some urban vandalism by the traffic engineers in the centre of Marple. Undoubtedly that campaign helped the membership drive and the membership drive helped the campaign. Many friends the Society made during that campaign subsequently joined the Society.

The membership drive has also raised the Society's profile in Marple. The local councillors, other societies and clubs and the press now know who we are and what we stand for in their community.

Alan Postill
Marple Civic Society
alan.postill@btopenworld.com