

Running A Recruitment Campaign To Rejuvenate A Bridge Club

Recruitment Campaigns fail when they are:

- **A one person effort.** Wide Club members' involvement is essential to success.
- **A short term effort.** Any programme needs to have an annual plan implemented across a number of years to have a proven Club structure for growth. Initially, you will run a one off campaign but, once proven, the club will realise that it is not onerous to have a campaign and may this annually or at least every other year.
- **Seen as too expensive and an unproven expenditure.** This is the great myth of recruitment campaigns. They should not be high spend. A full single campaign should be under £300 spend. The main resource required is the physical involvement of the members in getting the campaign message out. Do not under-estimate the number of "helpers" required to first run the campaign and then to assist/manage the students.
- **Lacking a development path for students.** All students require an equal mix of formal learning/themed practice; preferably more practice than formal teaching. Clubs that do not offer "early doors" student practice facilities find higher drop outs in teaching and often students switch to other, sometimes non-affiliated, clubs to get an appropriate level of practice. Where clubs are multi-session, a "no-fear", "gentle-bridge", "guided-play" bridge or similar level session, usually run in an afternoon, is realistic. For smaller clubs, often with one or two sessions only per week, creating a new "soft-bridge" session is daunting, sometimes doubling the Club's play activity. But to expect students to transition from formal lessons to main room play is totally unrealistic and a probable disaster. **For smaller clubs, establishing this new "soft-bridge" session is the main hurdle in their decision on whether to run a recruitment campaign.**

The mechanics of the Campaign

The hardest part of a recruitment campaign is getting started. This is because modern marketing is not known to most Bridge Club members and there is a fear of doing the wrong thing. This is quite understandable and is where a central EBU/YCBA "one-stop-shop" for campaign planning and design can overcome this initial reluctance. To be effective, the relationship between this central service and the Club needs to be close and highly responsive. For example, design response should be within 8 working hours to be effective as a design may pass through several iterations before finalising.

Also, the Bridge Club should request any Club member with marketing and design skills to be part of their team so that the team undertake the work and they receive guidance rather than passing across to the "one-stop-shop" to run the campaign mechanics and to make such as design decisions. The ownership stays squarely with the Club.

From our experiences of running campaigns to date with Clubs, we have found that:

Overall Timing

It can take up to six months from initiating a recruitment campaign request to the date of the first recruitment event / first lesson date. This is because a full marketing plan needs to be pulled together and this requires to be approved by committee and opportunity given to have the Club members' sanction (at AGM), members buy-in and involvement of volunteers. Getting a good plan agreed and committed to is one of the keys to success.

Also, you may decide to defer your campaign until after the AGM or to hit a preferred calendar month. This does not stop you starting to plan and design your campaign. The earlier the better.

Make an Event the Core Message

Have one key date as your core element in your message. This can be a “come and see us” date, “tea, buns and bridge” date and/or “lessons taster session” date. Do not have a general “come along sometime” message or overburden your literature by listing all the Club attributes. Keep it brief with a general “Bridge is fun” emphasis. Get them to the Club first and then tell them all the good things about the Club. If you can incorporate a charity donation aspect for the event, this may be beneficial to your profile.

Design of Literature

Actual design does not take long for leaflets when you use the “one-stop-shop” to make up to your rough ideas. If a standard template with specific wording and photography is used, then it will be quicker. It is the Club approval, perhaps via Committee, that often lengthens the decision process by months, particularly as designs go back for amendment and tweaking several times. Build this time into your plan and have leaflet design started at an early stage in your plan.

Be selective in your imagery and photography to give the widest age spread possible.

Make it easy for an interested person to make contact. Not just the Club email address. Someone needs to take responsibility to be there to offer immediate or at least speedy response. A personal contact mobile number is the preferred option.

You should work to proofs where standard design software has been used in creation so that you have a true picture of your final product; rather than Word created mock ups.

Print and distribution of Literature

Online printers are fast, cheap and reliable and will work off pdf's. Most printers will work on a next day delivery basis. Payment will be in advance against personal credit card. You should consider both A5 and A4 leaflet requirements. The difference in cost of 1,000 leaflets and 5,000 leaflets is low and your entire print cost should be under £100.

The bigger decision is, how much resource is going to be required to distribute the leaflets physically? Our experience is that blanket physical distribution is not cost effective. Door to door delivery has a poor return and should be used very sparingly to “select areas” if at all. This is best undertaken by sharing the delivery across willing Club members who will cover only a very limited home distribution area. This is the least effective method of distribution.

A better method, and probably the best method, is to have members use the leaflets as a tool in their personal promotion “word of mouth” with friends and associates. Encourage your members to speak to their other activity Clubs and ask if they will allow the leaflets to be displayed both physically and included on Club websites as a news event item. This may mean starting each play session over a week with a mention of the campaign and ask your members if they can each pass a few leaflets to friends and colleagues. This is also an opportunity to seek volunteers who can get you into golf clubs and other social clubs as they have membership and their own personal relationships. Much better than trying to hit targets cold.

Also, your list of emails for your Club members should be used. Send an email to all those with an email address in which you ask for help in “getting the word out” by forwarding the email to friends and associates and to which you have attached the leaflet in digital form (jpeg format so that can be dropped in easily).

Determine a prior plan for where and how many leaflets are going to be placed and who does what is a major aspect of your campaign. The campaign team need to put their heads together to identify all the local targets for leaflet placements and to think both physical display and digital leaflet images. So, golf clubs, bowling clubs, sports clubs, social clubs, U3A etc. and try to allocate who is going to do what for each drop point.

Also, undertake an early audit to see where your Bridge Club is listed. Many Clubs are omitted from local digital community listings and social club listings as no one at the Club has this allocated responsibility. A recruitment campaign is an ideal time to remedy these omissions.

You need to get your event messages placed within two months to six weeks before the event to give time for impact but not so long that people will forget.

Some of the locations to cover are:

Community locations – Libraries – could you have a mini library afternoon to publicise your main event? Get the librarians on board – they can be good advocates. Try Community hubs and halls. Not just the notice boards and display tables; also ask for your digital leaflet image to be put up on the community website and/or Facebook page. And do not forget the parish. Most places of worship take a broad view on community these days and will offer to publicise social event notices.

Health centres – Bridge is beneficial both mentally and socially. Use these arguments to have placements in doctors’ surgeries, dentist waiting rooms etc.

Retailers – Most superstores have a community policy and some are very supportive of local initiatives. The Co-op and morrisons are included. Others, such as Tesco, work entirely centrally and are not suitable. Explore these at an early stage. At the other end of the spectrum, the village convenience store is a community hub and it is worth paying the small cost of window display to have your leaflet shown. Do not be reticent to approach other retailers for free display placement from barbers/hairdressers to cafes, they usually will agree to placement. Anywhere that a person is waiting for service, be it the fish and chips queue or post office, they are all potential for display.

Local Press Media Advertising

Display advertising in the local press is expensive and does not have a proven return for the larger spends. Use the fact that you have an event to have your notice placed in the community news section as a box item. If you can get greater coverage by an article placement, then this is beneficial but remember that the editor works independently of the advertising department and you will need a separate approach. Standard Bridge advocacy articles are available from your “one-stop shop” for you to “top and tail” with your own Club details and information about your event should you go down this route.

In addition to town newspapers, both paid for and free press, look at local community magazines. These are editorial based. Avoid the magazines that are advertising-only publications for mainly

trade advertising. When talking to the local press, include their website into the conversation as local press do more business digitally than printed press these days.

Social Media

Bridge Clubs are only just beginning to discover social media. But some of their members will be already immersed in Facebook and Twitter and these should be recruited onto the campaign team as these are very powerful channels to generate interest. Where a Club does not have a website, it should at least have a Facebook page and preferably both.

Ensure that a digital version of your leaflet is placed on the Club website, Facebook and a Twitter dialogue is started.

Again your “one-stop shop” will offer guidance but Facebook and Twitter pages need personal ownership and you will have to run the social media campaign. Whilst this cannot be done from the service support centre, you will have available initial “hand holding” to get you up and running. Whilst, starting these elements seems daunting, they are easily overcome and will definitely benefit your campaign.

One of the tools that the 2017 Yorkshire Campaign has explored is to use paid for Facebook Marketing. This targets your Facebook contacts for your digital advert and you only pay for persons who indicate interest by “clicking” your advert. We have seen success with this approach which is extremely speedy with a large “population reach” and a local campaign over a 20 to 25 mile radius of the Club can be run for approximately £100 in the weeks prior to an event, so it is cost effective.

Local Radio

The 2017 Yorkshire Campaign has not included local community radio but recognises that this medium has potential for publicising a social Bridge event where this is newsworthy. So first look for the angle to add interest when deciding whether to contact these organisations. As with local press, substantial advertising spend is not seen as desirable.

The Post Audit

Finally, make sure that you capture where your attendees and students were first alerted to your event so that you can refine your campaign activity for the future.

Where you have successfully recruited students for your course(s), do not forget that they you can join them up free of charge to the EBU as Student Members for 12 months to receive magazines, diary and other benefits of EBU membership.

Finally, the Club activists may decide to cherry pick from this campaign menu. Do not try to force them into something that they are reluctant to take up. Accept their position and go with what is agreed. There is always next time when they are more confident to accept new techniques.

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