

BGA Governance Conference  
2008 Report

**British Gliding Association**



***MEMBERSHIP***  
**&**  
***MARKETING***  
***FORUM***

*April 2008*



## INTRODUCTION and WELCOME

Chaired by Marilyn Hood, Chair, BGA Communications & Marketing Committee

Marilyn opened the proceedings and welcomed Svend Elkjaer, managing Director of the Sports Marketing Network, a consultancy that helps sports clubs and governing bodies to engage more effectively with their publics.

Although not a glider pilot, Svend has recently visited several gliding clubs and would be drawing on his experiences during the presentation, without actually naming names.

## GROW YOUR GLIDING CLUB

Svend Elkjaer, Managing Director, Sports Marketing Network

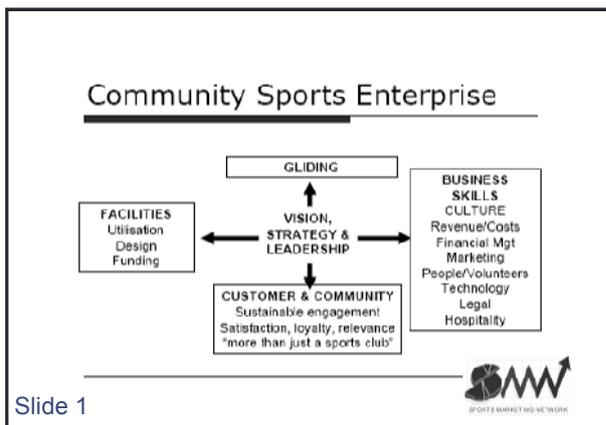
Svend explained that his session would not primarily be about marketing your gliding club but, rather, would concentrate on ensuring that it was energetic and welcoming and, as a result, was able to recruit and retain members as well as being seen as a focal point of the community.

The aim is to make your club vibrant, visible and viable.

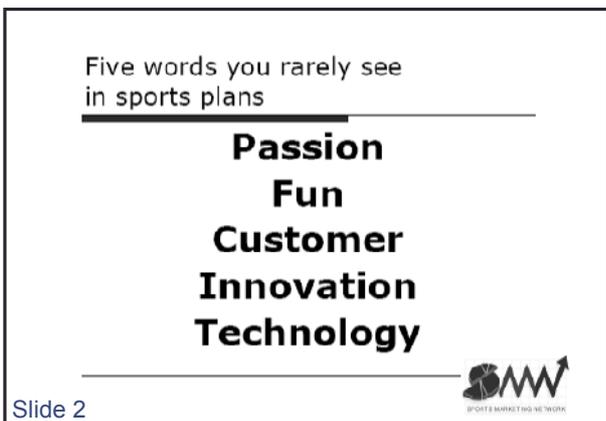
Although gliding is the raison d'être for all clubs, the activities of any gliding club go far beyond 'just' gliding.

The social environment has changed dramatically over the last 15-20 years. What worked in the past isn't necessarily the best approach today. Clubs need to adapt and evolve if they are to continue to attract new members – and to hold on to existing ones. (If you keep only 90% of your members each year, after just three years you will have lost nearly one third!)

The process of change is sometimes a delicate balancing act between keeping what is best of the old and what is needed for the future. Clubs need to understand the needs of their members and, possibly more difficult, understand the needs of untapped potential members. There is, all too often, a tendency for long established members to view the club as an extension of their own living rooms – resistant to change, suspicious of newcomers, unwilling to cater for other types of member, etc. Times have changed and, just because an idea has been tried unsuccessfully in the past, there is no reason to assume that it can't work today.



Many clubs, when putting together their plans, concentrate on the provision of sporting facilities. They forget that people belong to a sports club for one main reason – to enjoy themselves.



**Change vs. heritage**

- Understanding the needs of different segments (noisy kids, old f...s, chatty women!)
- 'But gliding is different'
- 'That won't work here...'
- 'This IS an extension of my living room'
- 'We tried that 14 years ago'

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SPORTS MARKETING NETWORK

Gliding clubs are no different to any other business in that a commitment to customer service needs to be at the heart of everything they do.

Sven suggested that clubs should aspire to be more than a launch facility. They should aim to be a focal point of their members' social lives and he challenged members of the audience to ask themselves whether they would choose to hold their birthday party at their club. If they wouldn't, why would their members choose to spend their own time there?



Many clubs have significant assets in their clubhouses which are not being used to anywhere near their maximum potential.

Svend acknowledged that, in the main, clubs were good at attracting potential members to part with their money to come and try gliding but suggested that not enough attention was paid to welcoming and making newcomers feel at home when they arrived for their first flight. All too often, the clubhouse and airfield surroundings did not show off the club and the sport in the best possible light.

Which of these more accurately describes your club?

**Dirty / Clean? – Cheap / Quality?**

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Much of this is symptomatic of not considering the club as anything other than a gliding facility. Club management needs to devote care and attention to ensuring that the total experience (for newcomers and for members) is a positive one.

**The WHOLE experience**

- Think of the whole experience of joining/booking a class/session: (Moment Mapping)
  - Decision to attend
  - Seek information
  - Booking
  - Transport
  - Experience at your centre
  - Do you make them love you
  - Ask/listen

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Sometimes, there will be considerably resistance to change. Where change is desperately needed, occasionally there may no alternative to electing a completely new committee.

**A view from an English National League Rugby Club**

**"I have to admit that trying to get the management team to agree that we need more community involvement is difficult. There are entrenched views and it is taking time to get long-standing members to realise there is no future for "just a rugby club"**

*Malcolm Tempest, ex-Commercial Manager (volunteer)  
Hull Ionians*

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Ultimately, however, the goal must be to develop your gliding club into a vibrant club for the WHOLE community. In doing this, there are 4 key areas to consider:

- Gliding
- Social
- Community
- Corporate

Svend described various activities that have been run at various (non-gliding) clubs and asked the audience to consider what the impact (financial, social, community) might be if one or two of these were run at their own club.

**Imagine if you did just ONE of these...(or two or three)**

<input type="checkbox"/> Beer Festival (involve CAMRA)	<input type="checkbox"/> Monthly network meetings for local businesspeople
<input type="checkbox"/> Summer Ball (Black tie/live music)	<input type="checkbox"/> Award Ceremony (Glider of the Year)
<input type="checkbox"/> Corporate Days	<input type="checkbox"/> Racing Night
<input type="checkbox"/> Mini/Junior Festival	<input type="checkbox"/> Doggy Walk
<input type="checkbox"/> Halloween Kids Party	<input type="checkbox"/> Stars in Your Eyes
<input type="checkbox"/> Quiz Night	<input type="checkbox"/> Schools initiative
<input type="checkbox"/> Ladies Lunch	<input type="checkbox"/> Migrant population (Polish Lunch or Curried goat)
<input type="checkbox"/> Auction of Promises	
<input type="checkbox"/> Food and Wine Festival	
<input type="checkbox"/> Casino Fun Night	

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As well as the more obvious benefits, turning your club into a vibrant and visible club for the whole community can have other significant benefits. Because people will be aware of you and see you in a positive light, you may:

- Find sponsors.
- Develop business relationships. These may simply be hosting corporate flying days; or they may involve joint partnerships – why not serve local speciality sausages, for example, at your club.
- Cultivate good relations with civic leaders. These may be useful if, for example, you have a particular planning or safeguarding issue.



Svend then turned his attention to the need to communicate with your members and your club's friends.

Use appropriate channels to communicate with members. The notice board is not the only means available to you – use Email/text messages etc. Be aware that not everybody chooses to communicate in the same way as you do. Email is prevalent now amongst most adults, but younger people see Email as being something for their parents – texting and social networking sites may be more important for them.

This change also has implications about how you market your club to younger people. Whilst older people will generally research a subject and place great importance on the provenance of information, the views of (often) unknown peers is more important to those in the younger age band. Cultivating 'brand champions' among these target groups is important.

Ensure that you gather contact details from anybody that you think could be valuable to your club – trial lesson participants, local businesses, councillors, tourists, etc – and use these to get your message out. Use these details also to improve customer service – if the weather is not

looking too good for tomorrow, contact those with trial lessons booked and offer to reschedule them. Let people who have attended previous events at your club know about upcoming ones. Be proactive.

Svend summarised his presentation with the following slide:

**If I ran a gliding club...**

- I would make it much more than a gliding club
- I would make it relevant to the community...a Hub for the Community
- I would use the assets 24/7
- I would use texting, emails and social media to communicate
- I would get every single opinion former down to the club
- I would make it welcoming

  
SPORTS MARKETING NETWORK

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## OPEN FORUM

Chaired by Marilyn Hood, Chair, BGA Communications & Marketing Committee

Following on from the presentation, it was pointed out that the approaches that should be taken are common to all clubs.

It was suggested that all clubs make someone responsible for welcoming people when they arrive the airfield, and perhaps this role should be undertaken by someone who has recently joined the club as they would be able to put themselves in the position of the new members/visitors.

This should be done as a matter of urgency as, if not made urgent, nothing is likely to happen.

Having visited some gliding sites, Svend's comments were that the sites that he visited had nice facilities; however finding the sites often proved difficult. Instructions on websites were too often unclear and did not tie up with the actual route.

Svend listed the things that as an alien to an airfield you would want to know. They were;

- How do you get there?
- Information point – where is the launch point?
- What is a launch point?
- Will someone shout at me if I drive across the airfield?

The discussion then moved on to the experience at the airfield and the related signage.

### Signage

It was commented that the first thing that visitors to an airfield saw was a plethora of warning signs.

It was felt that the necessary but somewhat off-putting messages on these signs needed to be put across in a positive way whilst still addressing the danger element.

The delegate from Midland GC reported that, as part of their preparation for hosting Competition Enterprise, they completely restructured their airfield signage. They removed all the existing signs and started from scratch. As well as looking neater, the danger messages were matched by positive messages, encouraging people to come up to the club house, rather than scaring them away.

### Catering

In rural areas the number of farm shops have doubled; airfields are in rural areas - make the link. Look critically at catering in your club - would visitors be happy to eat it? Some of Svend's suggestions were to;

- Hook up with a local farmer get local produce in
- Have taster sessions
- Market to a different audience
- Serve quality food
- Host guest ales

Marilyn shared her experience a recent visit to The Long Mynd and commented on the following plus points;



- Easy to find with good signage
- Impressive accommodation – the ‘bridal suite’ was the best gliding accommodation she had encountered.
- Good food
- One big table enabling members and visitors to mix and interact, stimulating conversation

Svend then shared the experiences of his wife when she was working in Boston, America. One particular hotel has a large table for single travellers so that they may eat together and meet different people and stimulate conversation.

### **Being approached**

A common problem at the larger clubs is that there are often many strange faces. It is not always easy to tell who are members and who are not. One delegate recounted arriving at the bar of a club and no one talked to him or acknowledged him for over half an hour.

Delegates felt that some members were hesitant about approaching people that they did not recognise in case they turned out to be members. However, it was felt that it was better to approach people and talk to them rather than ignoring them. Internal club communication should be used to stress the importance of this.

Some delegates expressed concern that it would be a difficult task to get members to do this. It was accepted that you can't convince everyone, but that they should lead by example.

### **Drumming up new contacts**

Contact details - business cards, etc - including EMail addresses should always be collected and the information used.

### **Diversification**

Svend made some further observations; airfields should be used for other uses as there are lots of time when flying is not going on. They should be made places that you want to be when there is no flying going on. The atmosphere of the club needs to be sold. Diversification is necessary if it does not occur the club will die.

One of the delegates reported that a potential source for income might be to contact a local wedding coordinator to suggest using the airfield as a wedding venue. No significant work is needed from the club as detailed planning and organisation is handled by the wedding coordinator.

### **After flight care**

Marilyn then told the delegates that during the Junior Worlds a person who had come to report on the event had told her that he had had a trial lesson before, but there had been no follow up afterwards. Ideally, the instructor who flew with him should have suggested what route to take next and provided more information as necessary. It

was agreed that contact details should always be taken after using the airfield/gliding club facilities.

Svend went on to say that he felt there were two questions that needed answering. Firstly how do prospective members find out about you? And do you make prospective and current members love you?

### **Cost and other pre-conceptions**

The discussion then turned to the price of trial lessons and what clubs hope to be achieved from them - are they purely a revenue stream or are they a source of prospective members. One delegate said that their club had increased the price of the single trial lessons considerably, but had dropped the price of multiple flight packages. It was felt that after three flights you knew whether gliding was for you or not. The club reported that this policy had resulted in a moderate increase in transition to membership.

Barry Lumb from Yorkshire GC informed the forum of his experience as Marketing Officer, having taken over in 2006. He reported that there was no real promotional effort in 2006, but that he had, with the assistance of an ex-ICI executive, had brainstormed matter and made plans. They carried out some market research with the general public to ascertain their opinions of gliding. The results that they found were;

- Gliding is dangerous
- Gliding is expensive
- They perceived that they could not do it
- Not attainable

We must address these points to change the public perception of gliding.

Marilyn commented on her experience from the BGA Canary Wharf display echoing the delegates' impressions of the public's misconceptions of the cost in particular.

It was suggested by Svend that some people might like to join a club as social members to use the club's facilities but not actually learn to fly. This was thought to be a good idea. Yorkshire GC confirmed that they already have a social member category.

### **Summary**

To finish, delegates agreed five priority ideas that could be taken away and applied in all clubs:

- Welcome signage
- Follow up contact
- Public perception of gliding
- Community relations
- The face of the club

Finally a brief excerpt of a DVD was shown. The DVD has been produced to be broadcast in 3 half hour programmes on Sky Sports, costing £20,000 funded by various sponsorship sources.

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