

D Promotion & Advertising

Introduction to promoting your club

Important Definitions

Customer: any individual, group of individuals, organization or corporation that utilizes a curling facility whether to rent ice or for non-curling purposes.

Service: any program (i.e. Little Rocks) or opportunity (i.e. membership, lounge rental) that a curling facility offers to its customers.

Product: a curling facility's product is the game itself. The product includes any league, bonspiel or competition at the club, but also includes food and beverage and lounge rental opportunities.

Why promotion is important to your club

To Improve Your Competitive Position

Today, curling clubs operate in a very competitive environment. Sport clubs, recreation groups, arts and cultural organizations, and other non-profit groups regularly compete for customers, volunteers, funding, sponsorship dollars and media space. However, all of these customer groups - people, governments, business and media - are make selective choices about where to apply their time, money and interest.

To Produce Valuable Programs

Operating effectively in today's competitive sport and entertainment industry means being able to meet the needs of the customer that are not being met by the competition. This means curling clubs must find out **what people want and give it to them in the most cost-effective way possible.**

To Create Interest in Your Club

Curling clubs and the sport of curling are faced with the challenge of communicating and delivering a successful image. People and sponsors want to be associated with success. If your club provides a positive experience for customers and is perceived by the public as "the place to be" or "a focal point of community activity", interest in your club will become contagious.

To promote effectively, find the answers to the following

Your surroundings

What does your curling club have to offer? What does the competition have to offer? What marketplace needs are not being met?

Target Groups

Who are your customers – the current membership and/or potential new members?

Price

Are you offering your product and service(s) at a competitive price?

Packaging

What elements have you mixed into your product and service(s) to make them as attractive as possible (i.e., location, timing, instructors, facilities)?

Sales

Are you encouraging your current customers and other facility users to promote the benefits of your curling club? Your current members can be your best salespeople under an effective recruitment campaign.

Advertising

Are you using the media (newspapers, magazines, radio, television, website and email) in order to attract customers? Because of costs involved, this may not be practical for some curling clubs, however, most communities have Public Service Announcements that are normally free of charge. They normally have guidelines on what you can and can't say in the ad, but they are definitely a worthwhile option.

Promotion

Are you providing any incentives in order to make your product or service(s) more attractive to the customer?

Public Relations

Are you taking advantage of available public appearances, public displays or media opportunity in order to make your customers more aware of your curling club's product and services?

Support Material

Are you producing flyers, brochures, websites or posters that describe the benefits **and** the features of your product or service to your customers?

Your curling club is a business

Benefits versus Features

Most club executive members or club managers spend their time concentrating on curling club details such as league schedules, bonspiels, clinics, annual meetings, providing participants with the proper equipment and the running of the facility itself. Their emphasis tends to be on organizing the activities, events or operations so that they all occur within certain time and budget constraints.

While these operations activities are essential to any curling club, it is important that the board, the executive members and management & staff focus their thinking on promotion and communication.

You must transfer your thinking from program features (i.e. "The league offers 12 games, every

Saturday evening") to customer benefits (i.e.. "Our Saturday evening league offers the chance to relax after the game in our newly renovated lounge"). **In essence, you must take yourself off the board and put yourself in the shoes of your customers.** Going back to our example, whether there are 8, 12 or 16 games on Saturday evenings probably won't mean that much to your customers. However, the chance to relax with friends on a Saturday evening could be very appealing.

In effect, this type of approach means providing each of your customers with specific benefits that will attract and encourage them to participate in your club and support its activities or events. To market your curling club effectively, you must be prepared to give something in return for what you are asking from your target group. But be careful not to give away more than you get in return.

Marketing – don't be afraid!

Here are three of the most common marketing myths

Myth # 1 – “You need to be a professional to write a marketing plan” There is a common myth that marketing is a high-level business activity that is well beyond the reach of the average volunteer in our curling clubs. Many of you are probably under the impression that you need years of formal business training in order to master marketing techniques.

The Fact Is – “Anyone can adopt the concept of marketing & marketing is quite simple!” All it means is finding a way to make your products & services attractive to your customers. This involves determining who your target groups are and to give them what they need to become regular customers.

Myth # 2 – “Marketing is too expensive” Many curling clubs are under the impression that to market effectively they must spend exorbitant amounts of money. Being constantly exposed to the high-priced, mass-media marketing techniques in today's world makes volunteers hesitant toward, or even intimidated by, the idea of marketing. Clubs believe that because they operate on a non-profit or low-profit basis, they can't afford to market.

The Fact Is - “Marketing can fit every curling club's budget & some of the most effective techniques are literally free!” For most clubs, marketing objectives are best attained through personal contact: word-of-mouth, personal sales, public and media relations, all of which have proven successful in curling club settings and cost very little. In fact, the very expensive techniques may be the least effective for your club.

Myth # 3 – “We don't have time to worry about marketing” You spend the majority of your time concentrating on running your curling club without giving much thought to the needs of your various customers. It's not surprising that you might feel you have little time left over to think about marketing and how it can improve your club.

The Fact Is – “Marketing will save time and worry in the long run. Making time for marketing will benefit your organization.” By giving you the opportunity to explore the needs of your customers, marketing will help you focus your efforts and ensure that you get the best possible results for the time and money spent.

Your Customer

The next step in developing an effective plan is to find out who your customers are and what they are looking for from your organization. For most curling clubs, these customers generally fall into eight broad target groups:

1. Existing membership including renters and regular users
2. Potential customers
3. Fans and spectators
4. All levels of government funding agencies
5. Corporate sponsors
6. Service clubs
7. Media
8. General public

It's important to recognize that these customers (or target groups as they are sometimes called) are very broad and should be broken down further by various demographics, (i.e. age, gender, education, geographic location, etc.) Use your common sense to match your facilities and resources with the "type" of people who are demanding your service.

Let's take a brief look at each customer type and their specific needs and interests:

1. Existing Membership including Renters and Regular Users

Members and regular participants form the backbone of every curling club. These users of your facility are the foundation upon which all your club activities, events and programs are built.

Unquestionably, existing members and regular participants are a very important target group that is all too often overlooked. Meeting the needs of existing users is vital to **retaining** their loyalty and participation. This concept is called "**customer service**". In exchange for their participation, these people should be able to expect such things as quality ice and facilities, opportunities for instruction, and the opportunity to compete and have a lot of good fun.

2. Potential Customers

In order to keep your programs running effectively, your curling club must always look for new ways to attract new customers; people who will want to participate, join, or help run the leagues and activities at your club.

To attract new people, you must provide them with the very same things that you provide to existing users: quality ice and facilities; an opportunity to receive quality instruction; and, a good time for all. But more importantly, you must provide them with information about all of the benefits to be gained through membership, by means of leaflets, brochures, websites, posters and presentations to various community groups. Potential members and users must know why they might want to try the sport, what they can expect and what the potential benefits are for them. For example, you might want to hold a "Bring a Friend" day where existing members invite a friend to the club to experience the sport of curling and the positive club atmosphere first hand.

3. Fans and Spectators

Curling clubs often hold bonspiels, social events and other activities that tend to be the "showcase" of club activities. The fans and spectators who attend these events provide your club with a great deal of support. They buy tickets and refreshments that make events all worthwhile.

In exchange for their support, fans and sponsors want to enjoy themselves, meet and socialize with other people and be part of an exciting event. They are also attracted by quality facilities such as seating and food concessions, and information about the event that is going on and about upcoming events. Most importantly, they want value for their dollar.

It is important to remember that your spectators and fans may also be potential users. So it would be a good idea to provide them with information about the benefits of belonging to your organization. Once you've got them in your club, convince them to stay!

4. Government Funding

Many curling clubs rely on some type of government funding to contribute toward their operations. This may involve municipal government, regional or community recreation boards or, in some cases, provincial or federal grants. (See Section 3- "Grants")

In order to get government funding, your curling club must be able to provide facts and figures, publicity, acknowledgement and specific criteria to help them do their job properly and to justify their financial investments. They also want a demonstration of sound financial planning and management, strong self-help initiatives, sound administration of activities and a solid level of participation within the walls of your facility.

5. Corporate Sponsors

With rising expenses and increased competition for revenue, curling clubs today must seek out new ways to finance their programs and operations. Corporations and smaller businesses may be willing to sponsor a program, event, bonspiel or even a team if they are given something in return. In the business community today, money, service or gifts in kind are viewed as investments and can no longer be considered donations!

In exchange for their financial support, most businesses are looking for a few simple things - a new means of marketing their own product, corporate identification, to sponsor a product which is in keeping with their corporate image. The key to meeting the needs of corporate sponsors is to provide equal or greater value in exchange for the money they invest. These sponsors know how much exposure they get for each dollar spent in traditional advertising. Your challenge is to provide ways for the sponsor to gain exposure of equal or greater value than can be 'bought' elsewhere.

6. Service Clubs

Your curling club is part of a bigger community and one very important source of support can come from the service clubs within this community. If your curling club runs programs or events for youth groups, special needs groups or others, often you will find a service club that is willing to support your cause.

e.g., Kinsmen Little Rock Program, Lions' Legends of Curling League, etc.

In exchange for its support, the service club will require recognition of its contribution to your curling programs, as well as your support of other community service activities the service club may be involved in. i.e. "You scratch my back..."

7. The Media

Publicity is a significant part of a healthy, growing organization. If you give the media what they want, they can be one of your most important customers. They will provide you with the coverage you need to promote your programs and to let the public know what you have to offer.

In exchange for coverage of your programs and events, you must offer the media something valuable in return. For the most part, the media is looking for an interesting story or angle, as well as accurate and timely information in the form of press releases and other material to make their job easier. Today's reporters are very busy and must be selective about where they spend their time. You and your curling club will have to go to the media and not wait for the media to come to you!

8. The General Public

A positive public image provides an advantage that no volunteer organization can do without. A good clean image may create support for your curling club by attracting new participants or encouraging businesses and other sponsors to align themselves with your club and activities. It is very difficult to assess the needs of this group of customers because it is so broadly based.

First, you must decide what type of image you present (e.g., fun-loving, serious, conservative, responsible, creative, energetic, etc.). Then you must create and maintain this image through all your program and promotional activities. Establishing a good, consistent image will help you to attract the support and interest of the public at large.

Research Made Simple

By now you should have a much clearer idea of the specific groups of people that your curling club is trying to reach. You should also have a general idea of what each of these eight target groups may want from participation opportunities at your club. Now it's time to get specific about your organization.

Research your market in order to find out exactly what to offer each of your target groups in "exchange" for their support. This information will be critical as you proceed with plans to increase participation and support for your club.

Determining the specific needs of your target groups is a very simple process, and it's an important step for several reasons:

- It keeps you in touch with your customers' changing needs.
- It helps you define and solve specific problems.
- It allows you to make more accurate programming decisions.
- It assists in the development of long and short range plans for your organization.
- It generates new customers
- Having documented market needs make you more attractive to government sponsors.

Here's how to research in seven simple steps!

1. Analyze Your Current Situation

Identify areas of concern or areas which you feel could be improved within your curling club (e.g. membership numbers, revenues and expenses, public image, etc.). Now ask yourself which of these areas should have the highest priority

2. Set Your Research Objectives

To address your concerns or areas for improvement you will require various types of information. The objective of your research will be to find the information you need. (e.g. how do our

members feel about...; what do our sponsors think about...; etc.).

3. Organize and Carry Out Your Research

a) Determine your Target Groups: If, for example, your major concern is a lack of new members, then the people you want to survey are potential users. Decide what kind of people would potentially be interested in your programs (e.g., seniors, teens, males, females, etc.).

b) Choose a Method to Contact Them: There are generally four methods of research you can use: face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews, direct mail questionnaires, and the Internet. Decide which of the four is most suitable for your purposes.

c) Prepare your Survey Questions: Draw up a simple one-page form consisting of no more than 10 questions that you want to ask your target groups. Remember, only ask questions that you are prepared to act upon when you receive the answer. For example, if you ask "Would you like to see a decrease in fees?" or "Would you like to see a new rink built?" you should be prepared to follow through.

d) Pretest your Questionnaire: Once you've done three or four interviews, review the responses and decide whether they are providing the information you need. If not, it might be a wise idea to analyze your questions and decide how you can reword them to invite a more in-depth response.

e) Collect the Information: Carry on with your survey, interviewing everyone on your list.

4. Analyze the Responses

Summarize the responses and decide what all this information collectively tells you.

5. Prepare a Written Report

Based on these responses, write a one or two page summary report. Make some general conclusions and recommendations for a plan of action.

6. Follow Through

Together with your fellow board members, determine ways to implement the recommendations and execute the plan of action. Be sure to inform the survey respondents and the general club membership of the survey results and your intended plan of action. Don't miss this opportunity to market your product!

7. Evaluate Your Efforts

Over a designated period of time, be sure to evaluate the success of your action plans to ensure that your efforts are creating the desired results.

Summary

Remember the simpler the approach, the more likely you are to get a response. The best advice for researching your market is to use plain common sense. In addition to using the seven step procedure recommended here, keep your eyes and ears open for market trends and current needs. Read your local newspapers, browse through magazines and periodicals, watch current event television shows, and talk to people in your community to discover the latest trends, fads and public interests.

As an example of one type of market research tool, the following questionnaire could be used to survey the needs of your existing members.

Sample Member Survey

The Anytown Curling Club needs your opinion on how the club is operated and how it can be improved. Please complete and return this survey. Your response is confidential.

I am under 18 under 25 26 – 30 over 50
 Male female

How important is each of these factors in your decision to keep curling?

	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important
Competition	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Exercise	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social fun on ice	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social fun off ice	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Just love the game	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Tell us how satisfied you are with these club programs or services:

	I like	I'm not satisfied	Adequate, or no opinion
Intra-club bonspiels	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Special club socials	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Awards banquet	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Change facilities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Comfort of lobby	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Quality of ice	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Men's leagues schedule	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Women's leagues schedule	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Senior Leagues schedule	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mixed open leagues schedule	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Member camaraderie	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Competitive opportunity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Practise ice	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Junior program	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Family/child program	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Recruiting program	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Open house/pot luck	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How club recruits new members	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Programs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Clinics, courses, etc.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Dues and fee level	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Length of season	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My voice can be heard	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (list)			
_____	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
_____	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
_____	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Your comments on any of the above or your suggestions for improvement:

Are you interested in becoming involved further in our club? Yes No

Do you wish to have an Executive Member contact you to discuss club operations? Yes No

If you answered **Yes** to either of the above questions, please provide your name, phone number and e-mail address.

Name _____

Phone Number _____

E-Mail Address _____

~~~~~  
**YOUR RESPONSE IS CONFIDENTIAL!**  
Thank you very much for your co-operation!

# The Environment You Live In

In this section, you will determine:

1. What your organization has to offer.
2. What your competition has to offer.
3. How you can fill the gaps in your marketplace.

## **1. What Your Organization has to Offer**

Every curling club has its strengths and weaknesses, its successes and failures. How might each of the following groups describe the image of your curling club?

- Club executive, management and staff
- Club members and other participants
- Sponsors: corporate, governmental or service clubs
- The non-curling public

## **2. Participation in Your Programs and Activities**

- a) Current participation
  - In general terms, is participation at your club at the desired level?
  - Give reasons for your response.
- b) Potential Participation
  - Is there potential to increase the numbers of participants?
  - Give reasons for your response.

## **3. Your Financial Stability**

As if you were sending a letter to a trusted friend, describe the general state of your club's financial health.

## **4. Your Existing Programs and Activities**

- a) Programs, activities and events are the heartbeat of any curling club. Every club will have three types of existing programs and activities:
  - Membership Programs: clinics, competitions, publications, bonspiels, leagues, social functions, special events.
  - Public Participation Programs: open houses, special events, public meetings.
  - Management Activities: board meetings, the annual general meeting, and committee meetings.
- b) Take an inventory of your current programs, and services
  - List the primary membership programs you offer now.
  - List any public participation events you offer.
  - List your club's management activities.
- c) Rate each of the items on its potential to:
  - increase participation at your club;
  - heighten your public image;
  - generate revenues.
- d) Use the following scale to rate the potential of your inventory items (The higher the combined potential rating of an activity, the greater the potential benefit for your curling club. e.g. AAA is the highest rating a program can get.
  - A - high potential
  - B - medium potential
  - C - low potential

## **5. What Your Competition has to Offer**

Curling clubs, like profit-driven businesses, have competitors who are direct rivals for the attention and support of customers, volunteers and sponsors. The current trend towards health, fitness and leisure activities has encouraged a multitude of sport and recreation groups to provide services and facilities to a hungry public.

Within your area, there may be any number of these groups who are offering programs and activities that could be similar to, or better than, the ones you provide. These can range from other volunteer sport organizations, professional sport organizations (e.g. junior hockey), fitness clubs or any sport-related business that offers a service for which people are willing to pay. However, we can't forget that curling clubs, by tradition, are in the social and entertainment business, as well. **Therefore, any sport, leisure or entertainment organization is a potential competitor of your curling club. Your competitors are not solely other curling clubs!**

If your club is to succeed in this increasingly competitive environment, you must use effective methods to design and promote programs and activities that will make you stand out from the rest, attract your particular target groups, and fill any gaps in the marketplace.

As in any competitive situation, the only sure way to launch a successful strategy is to "know your competition". A thorough understanding of what they offer your target groups will help you decide what you have to do to compete effectively.

### **Consider the following when learning about your competition.**

**a) Who is Your Competition?** Who are the major competitors in your area? (volunteer associations or private recreation, fitness and sport groups or entertainment businesses.)

**b) Target Groups** Identify your competitors' customers? (e.g., children, teens, seniors, parents, business people, etc.)

**c) Price** How much does your competition charge for their services? What is their pricing structure? (e.g., free, nominal fee, reasonable charge, expense, off-season discounts, block-bookings)

**d) Packaging** What elements has your competition mixed into their services to make them attractive? (e.g., location, timing, instructors, facilities, etc.)

**e) Advertising** Are they using media space (newspaper, magazine, radio, television) in order to attract customers? Which form of media advertising do they use?

**f) Promotion** Does your competition offer an attractive incentive to make their product or service more appealing to their customers? (e.g., discounts, 2 for 1 sales, sweepstake draws for members, celebration parties, etc.)

**g) Public Relations** Do they get free media coverage to make their customers more aware of their products or services? (e.g., news articles, interviews, public service announcements, etc.)

**h) Support Material** Does your competition produce flyers, brochures or posters that describe the benefits of their products or services for their customers?

## Summary

Spending some time doing research on your competition and recording your responses to the questions above will provide your club with invaluable information to develop your future marketing strategies.

### **6. Here is the important part**

Once you have completed this exercise, look for any gaps that your curling club can fill - that is, try to pinpoint the areas where you can offer your customers specific benefits that your competitors cannot provide. Also, try to identify things your competitors are doing particularly well and try to improve on them in your own club. This thought process will give you a useful focus for designing/adapting and promoting your programs to the customers you want to attract. It can also help you stay within the limits of the time and resources you have available. For example:

- Is the competition offering a program that could be provided at a much cheaper price or better quality, location, time, etc.? (e.g. social events - can your club offer better bar prices, catering service, facility space and amenities, etc.)
- Do you have connections that will allow you to do better promotion? (e.g. use the wealth of contacts and experience within your membership.)
- Can you get free publicity? (e.g. if the competition is using Public Service Announcements, community calendars, media interviews, etc., why can't your curling club?)
- Can you package your programs to fill a need that is not presently being met by your competition? (e.g. can you add that *extra touch* to give you a little edge on the competition?)

### **7. Developing Strategies: seven P's of selling**

Now that you are ready to come up with strategies to improve your business, you will need to consider the seven P's of selling they are:

- Product
- Place
- Partnership
- People
- Price
- Promotion
- packaging

#### **THE FIRST P - Product**

Describe the programs and services that are implied in the strategy.

#### **THE SECOND P – Place / Distribution**

How and where will you deliver your strategy.

#### **THE THIRD P - Partnerships**

List all possible partners that may be interested in becoming involved in this strategy.

| Organizations | Reason for involvement | Expectations |
|---------------|------------------------|--------------|
|               |                        |              |

### **THE FOURTH P - People**

Customers are everything – studies show that 68% customers stop dealing with an organization because of poor service. List ways your strategy can ensure the best possible customer service creating a high retention percentage.

### **THE FIFTH P - Pricing**

While price is the only element that generates revenue there is misconception regarding pricing in sport and recreation is that all costs associated with pricing are monetary in nature. Pricing costs must also consider time and convenience factors. List the pricing considerations for each strategy

### **THE SIXTH P - Promotion**

Promotion includes communication tools that an organization can use to inform, educate and to persuade the identified target markets. They also take into account:

- Publicity and Public Relations
- Incentives
- Personal Contact and Sales
- Events
- Advertising

List the communication tools that can be integrated into the strategy.

### **THE SEVENTH P - Packaging**

Check that all stakeholders have been considered in the partnerships. Do the programs and services meet the needs identified throughout the strategic planning process? Are there any strategies that can link the various programs and services into a new membership package - program or services. List the ways a strategy can ensure effective packaging.

## **Events - Open House**

### **Why do it?**

Attracting new customers is essential for the survival and growth of every curling club. Participating in an open house will not only bring new curlers through the door, but will also revitalize existing members' interest by providing the enjoyment of getting involved in a new event.

### **The Challenge**

- a) Use your own enthusiasm for the sport to encourage others to give it a try.
- b) Use as many of the ideas and materials as you can to get the message out.
- c) Encourage everyone at your club to share in the welcoming of newcomers who are making inquiries or playing for the first time. Everyone becomes a delegate to promote the club. If people feel welcome and have fun, they'll be back and everyone wins.

### **Getting started / getting organized**

The most likely first step in launching your Open House, would be to form an organizing committee. Once the main committee members are in place, focus on recruiting others to help keep the ideas in motion. Areas of responsibility for your committee and volunteers should include:

- Chairperson - oversee the organization of the Open House and the use & distribution of promotional material, including people and finances.

- Publicity and Promotion - spreads the word about your activities within your club and out in the community.
- Registration - tracks potential new members.
- Orientation and Welcome - creates ways and means of introducing new people when they arrive at your club for the first time.
- Hosts, Buddies and Mentors - ensures that every new guest has an ongoing contact person to help answer questions and ease the introduction to your club and its facilities. Personal contact can be a powerful tool in encouraging new memberships.
- Incentives - develops rewards for participation to encourage future involvement at the club.
- Instruction - explains the sport's basics through clinics or lessons.
- Competitions - includes organizing celebrity games, funspiels, teams, draws and schedules.
- Social Activities - emphasizes the social aspect of the sport and your club.
- Volunteer Recognition - thanks everyone who contributed to the event.
- Follow-up - maintains contact with people who attended your events or made inquiries and, if need be, extends additional invitations later in the season. (Follow-up can be as simple as a postcard to let people know you haven't forgotten them, or as detailed as inviting them to another event during the season or after the summer. Either way, remember to take advantage of all the fruits of your efforts again at the beginning of the next season.)

### **Timing of your event**

Ideally, an open house should be held once a month at your club. Schedule a large open house at the start of the year and one during the prime television season when curling receives tremendous visibility. Smaller open houses could be held monthly during the season – remember, our doors should be open to new customers all the time.

It is important, however, that you understand what you can or can't do as a club. If you are able to run but one open house, choose your date carefully and be the best that you can be.

In planning your activities, the organizing committee could use the following suggested time line:

#### **a) Three to six months ahead:**

- Hold organizational meeting to establish committee(s) and make preliminary plans.
- Establish budget.
- Identify the target market. (Refer to "Targeting" in next section.)
- Determine dates for event(s).
- Book ice and facilities.
- Work with club executive to establish incentives for new members.

#### **b) Two to three months ahead:**

- Recruit volunteers to help.
- Begin communication with membership to inform them of your event dates and request volunteers - perhaps in club newsletter or on facility bulletin board or web site.
- Develop buddy system program. Members will act as contacts for new people.
- Plan advertising and promotion activities for inside and outside the club.
- Develop follow-up strategy.
- Solicit sponsors and suppliers who may wish to support your event. Offer fair value and visibility in return for their support.

#### **c) Four to five weeks ahead:**

- Intensify your efforts to let members know about your event(s) and your campaign. Hang posters, send emails, distribute brochures, contact media representatives to reserve ad space,

provide members with details of planned activities including sign-up information. Request names of potential contacts from members.

- It's time to let the community know what you have planned. Start your advertising and communications plans outside the club. Personal contact can help especially for media or large company groups. Personally invite individuals and/or groups to tour the facility and try the game.
- Confirm required supplies, decorations, promotions.

**d) One week ahead:**

- Finalize registration plans.
- Make final push to get members involved in the event, including bringing friends.
- Remind media, particularly community newspapers, about events and photo opportunities. Make sure someone from club is also taking photos.
- Hold final meeting of all volunteers to nail down details.

**e) The Big Day! The easy part – Get out and welcome newcomers!**

**f) One week afterward:**

- Thank each person who helped. A wind-up party could be fun.
- Post-event publicity. Let the public and media know what happened. Photos are an excellent way to emphasize the fun aspects of curling. Post digital photos on your website.
- Prepare summary report which will help future organizers.
- Hold wrap-up committee meeting to evaluate event and to confirm follow-up activities for the summer and fall.
- It's never too soon to begin planning for next year. Start while the ideas and enthusiasm are fresh.
- Use follow-up cards.

**Targeting prospective customers**

If you focus your attention on people you want to attract to your club, you will greatly enhance the possibility of success. There are two important areas to investigate before you start:

- a) Determine your club's strengths and weaknesses. Do you have specific needs? If so, concentrate your efforts in those areas. Consider the following sectors: mixed curling, families, women, commercial league curlers, occasional renters, or any group that will increase participation and build membership in your club.
- b) Look at your community to see if there are any other opportunities. In other words, look for groups of people that are not using your facility but could be, if the invitation was extended and someone made it attractively easy. Knowing who you're hoping to attract and concentrating on specific target groups makes it easier to choose and plan activities.

**Establishing contacts**

A successfully used practice in business is to ask current customers to recommend prospective new ones. This concept can work well for open house. It's extremely simple. Ask current members to identify individuals who may be interested in attending your event(s). The following is an example of a contact list that may be used to record the names of prospective people identified by members. Be sure to find someone on your committee to extend invitations to the people on the list.

**Prospective Customers**

| <b>NAME</b> | <b>E-MAIL</b> | <b>RECOMMENDED BY</b> |
|-------------|---------------|-----------------------|
| _____       | _____         | _____                 |
| _____       | _____         | _____                 |
| _____       | _____         | _____                 |
| _____       | _____         | _____                 |

**Using promotional material**

**a) posters:** Display in outside locations as stores, businesses, libraries, offices, churches, community centres. In most locations, all you have to do is ask. Remember internal opportunities as well, such as bulletin boards, lockers rooms, lobby and lounge. Be sure to include details of event in the space provided: Dates, events, sign-up information, contact person's name and phone number.

**b) Brochures** communicate with non-curlers, individuals, groups or businesses outside of your club. The brochures can also be used to inform members about plans for the Open House. Include a letter from the President explaining what you're trying to do, stressing the necessity of attracting new members to the vitality of the club and the importance of members helping to welcome new curlers. Customize the brochures with key information: club name, address, contact information. Here are tips for brochures to two different target groups:

**The community:**

- Distribute by mail, but also include a letter of introduction on your club letterhead.
- Drop off at businesses or locations within the community that can deliver the message to your target groups.
- Organize members to conduct a door-to-door "drop-off" of brochures in your community.
- Ask club members to distribute pamphlets at their place of employment.

**The membership:**

- Include with mail-outs to membership.
- Hand out to league teams.
- Leave on tables in lounge, locker rooms or lobby.
- Hang on walls/bulletin boards like mini-posters.
- Display on club's front counter or bar.

**c) Camera-ready advertisements:** the Canadian Curling Association has camera-ready ads for use in both club and out-of-club print publications. They include catchy slogans such as:

- "Come Throw Rocks at our House"
- "Get taken out by someone you just met"
- "With every game played, your contact with the world expands"

(Feel free to use these in any application – no approval necessary)



## Media

Be sure to include an invitation to have the media attend and perhaps even participate in your event. You can also include other pertinent items such as a brochure and the details of your planned activities — or camera-ready ads and a logo sheet, if they are required.

## Follow-up postcards

Staying in touch with guests who attend your open house is important in helping to bring them into your club membership. The use of postcards is a quick and friendly way to let your guests know you'd like to see them back at your club. Put them to good use! Send them a week after your event(s). Include a contact name, phone number and maybe a quick note about a future event at the club for the prospective new member to attend.

**\*\* hint:** Consider doing a second or even third follow-up by telephone or mail. This will confirm your club's strong interest in the new curler and show them you really want their business and that you enjoy their company. A welcoming and friendly environment helps reinforce the idea that curling is a wise choice, for a variety of reasons.

## Preparing the welcome

When new people arrive, they'll be unfamiliar with the ways of your club and may have limited knowledge about the game itself. To lessen any anxiety and ease new people into life at your club, it is important to do everything possible to extend a friendly and informative welcome. The following are some things you may want to consider:

- Orientation sessions and tours - Take time to talk to newcomers about your club. Finish the explanation with a tour of the facility. (include the compressor room!)
- Information hand-outs - Give all newcomers written details of how your club operates. Include all information about **every** program and services offered by your club.
- Incentives - Consider start-up incentives such as trial or provisional memberships (e.g. a one-month membership), fee breaks for first time curlers, equipment packages, or group or family rates.
- Special touches - Often little things count a lot. Free coffee, munchies and a smile go a long way toward making someone feel welcome.
- Mentors or buddies - Existing members assigned as a “buddy” to a new curler adds to the initial comfort level and eases the novice’s initiation to the club throughout the first year. Or, mentors can provide support only until new curlers feel completely comfortable.

## Example of Open House Activities

- a) Instruction:** Provide the opportunity for new curlers to receive some brief instruction on the basics of the game. Initially, a brief session is best, but be sure to make more in-depth instructional opportunities available at a later date. Try to have experienced curlers playing on other sheets. Newcomers will be more relaxed
- b) Competition:** Playing the game is what truly gets people started. Organize Pro-Am bonspiels, funspiels, mini-games. Take care to match experienced curlers with new curlers. Emphasize the fun and enjoyment aspects to make novice players more comfortable and more inclined to try again.
- c) Social Activities:** include novice players in post-game socializing or follow an event such as a celebrity bonspiel with a get-together, at which visitors get to meet local personalities and club regulars.

### Follow-Up

Although all aspects of your Open House are important, the key to the overall success will be the interest your club shows in new people. Find ways of including new curlers in the season's activities and be sure not to forget new curlers during the summer. Stay in contact through written correspondence, the telephone, e-mail or your mentor network. Consider organizing a welcome-back event later, for those that don't register for a fall league.

## **Bonspiels and Outside Rentals**

Bonspiels and corporate outings (or casual rentals) are significant aspects of the operation of any curling club. Properly managed, they can have a favourable impact on not only your bottom line, but the image and perception of your club as well.

Bonspiels and rentals can fill slack periods (especially daytime ice) and can act as a terrific public relations and member recruitment tool. Well organized bonspiels and company fun days deliver fun, competition and happy customers which, at the end of the day, put money in the cash register.

Here are a few **philosophical statements** to consider that may help drive your management policy:

- a) It is important to determine the primary function of your facility thereby prioritizing regular play, bonspiels, corporate outings, association commitments and lounge rentals. Many clubs fall into a 'trap' where extracurricular activities come at the expense of regular play. In these cases, club members can become disgruntled with the lack of playing time. Remember, time is a precious commodity with today's society. For example, if we plan on curling every Wednesday night and our night of curling is postponed for other activities on a regular basis, we will soon look for other places to curl.
- b) Once you have determined your primary function, develop a set of values. For example, many curling clubs are now focusing on family-based leagues and events. The value statement could read: "*The Anytown CC will focus on delivering opportunities structured towards family curling*". This type of statement will help you when it comes to developing policy. As example, your club institutes a time slot for families. Both adults and children will receive instruction and then participate in games together. Meanwhile, the club has received a request from a service group for the same time slot. Your value statement will help you make your decision protecting your investment in your family programs.
- c) Groups or organizations who might rent ice at your club on a weekly basis should be treated equally. They should enjoy all of the privileges of a club member except the right to have a say in the operation and the right to participate in competition. (The definition of renter varies from area to area. In this case a renter is a group who is interested in a particular time slot week to week and usually represents an organization or service club i.e. Legion, school teachers.)

### Two Key Definitions

- a) **Bonspiel:** an organized event in which the curling club must market & recruit participants and stage.
- b) **Corporate Outing:** an organized social or charity event where a group of people contracts the club for the use of a particular time slot.

# Bonspiels

## The Eight Ends of organizing a successful bonspiel

**1<sup>st</sup> End: What are you doing?** – There are two basic types of bonspiels: the social and the cash bonspiel. While we may call it the social, most of these bonspiels are as competitive as the cash bonspiel. The level of play may differ, but everyone likes to win and everyone wants a prize. So your first decision is what kind of event we want to organize and are there enough teams who might want to participate. Now, investigate the following factors in staging a funspiel or banquet circuit event:

- a) what date would be convenient for both the club and potential participants (it makes no sense to schedule a mixed invitational if there are two others in the area at the same time)
- b) Choose a theme. This will help you create all kinds of neat ideas ranging from the prize table to the entertainment to the food provided.

**2<sup>nd</sup> End: Who's coming?** – How many teams can you accommodate? A four sheet club cannot run a 32 team event bonspiel unless all day Friday is used or play begins Thursday night. Likewise, is it worthwhile to stage a 12 team bonspiel in an 8 sheet club? There would be lots of empty ice and the facility will be empty despite 48 participants

**3<sup>rd</sup> End: How much?** – How much do you charge? People are price conscious and expect the benefits of the event to outweigh the cost. Therefore, you must be very careful in determining the entry fee. Curlers will not bat an eye at paying \$1000 per team to play in a 32 team triple knockout with \$60,000 in prizes, however, do you think they will pony up the \$1000 for a cashspiel with 32 teams and \$30,000 in prizes. Nope. The same can be said for social invitationals. You won't get any entries if you were to charge \$200 for three games guaranteed, a bowl of chili and curling brooms as prizes. Right away the curler has figured out that the club is trying to make money from entry fees. Now there is nothing wrong with making money from the entry as long as you can deliver more than a \$200 value to the participants.

This might mean you will have to develop sponsorship and suppliers who will help you out with either cash or contra (goods in lieu of cash). For example, the local grocery store where you buy all of your supplies agrees to kick in \$2000 worth of food supplies and your insurance agent donates a couple of dozen golf balls as prizes. The money from entries you would have had to spend on food has been covered and can be redirected to prizes and you won't have to buy two prizes because you have two already donated. (Obviously, the more prizes donated the better, however, be careful on what you accept and then must give out. The rule of thumb is if you wouldn't want the item as a prize for yourself don't put it on the table. Tell your contributors you are looking for gifts valued at \$25 or more.)

Now you are ready to charge the \$200 for your mixed invitational because you are supplying snack trays on Friday night and roast beef dinner on Saturday followed by the dance. Your prize table includes fishing and golf stuff, brand name kitchen appliances etc. This 'spiel is definitely worth \$50 per head!

**4<sup>th</sup> End: Selling your event** – Promote, promote and promote some more. You will need to attract a broad audience to fill your event. Here's what you can do:

- a) Create a poster that will stand out against the others on curling club notice boards. Remember to focus on the benefits and the value for the entry fee!

- b) Send a personal invitation to as many people as you can – even front end players! Remember to ask for names and at minimum e-mail addresses so that you can begin to develop your own extensive database for future years.
- c) Get the stuff on your webpage.
- d) Advertise in the public service announcements in the newspaper and the local television rolodex. These things are free and you wouldn't believe how many people read and watch these announcements.

**5<sup>th</sup> End: Volunteers** – Organizing any bonspiel takes time, planning and a lot of volunteer hours. Don't always rely on your core group of volunteers to run your events. Instead of having a small group working on each part of the weekend, involve many people with specific tasks. Everyone will get in on the fun and it will be an enjoyable weekend.

**6<sup>th</sup> End: Food** – What you serve and how you serve it will contribute greatly to your reputation of hosting great events. Spend some time in your planning to make the food experience a memorable one. Why do you think Fisherman bonpiels are so popular – it's the lobster and seafood not the curling!!

**7<sup>th</sup> End: the Draw** – This may be the most critical part of the overall planning and one where you may get the most criticism. Curlers will always complain about back-to-back on the same sheet of ice, or too many games on the outside sheets, or a late game followed by an early game, or worse, a series of bad times. Here are some hints to squelch the complaints:

- a) When assigning sheets of ice for each game, start at the end of the draw and work back. Create a small chart with the sheets of ice across the top and the days and times on the left to help you understand what ice is available as you assign the sheets.

| Day and time    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|-----------------|---|---|---|---|
| Friday @ 7pm    | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Friday @ 9pm    |   |   | ✓ |   |
| Saturday @ 9am  |   | ✓ |   |   |
| Saturday @ 11am |   | ✓ |   |   |
| Saturday @ 1pm  | ✓ |   | ✓ |   |

- b) Avoid back-to-back games on the same sheet. Near the end of the bonspiel, it may be difficult to schedule three different sheets in a row for any given time. It's okay to book ice 2, ice 3, and ice 2 for example.
- c) Try and avoid three games in a row on outside sheets. Back to back on say ice 1 then ice 4 is often unavoidable. Make certain their third game is on an inside sheet.
- d) Draw times are always an issue. Try and give every team in their first three games one great draw, one bad draw and one so-so draw. Here is an example of draw times for a 24 team 'spiel starting Friday night.

| Group A (8 teams)                                | Group B (8 teams)                                | Group C (8 teams)                                 |
|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| Friday @ 5pm<br>Saturday @ 1pm<br>Saturday @ 5pm | Friday @ 7pm<br>Saturday @ 9am<br>Saturday @ 3pm | Friday @ 9pm<br>Saturday @ 11am<br>Saturday @ 7pm |

- e) One final tip: many bonspiels will not schedule any curling on Saturday night because of entertainment or banquets. The concern is, that as a host committee, you often have to hope that curlers will come back for the entertainment. Schedule the entertainment to overlap the evening draws so that those curling at 9pm will see the last part of the show when they got off the ice. The bonus happens at 9pm and 11pm when you will have 32 people joining your party (based on a four sheet club)!

**8<sup>th</sup> End: First Contact** – This is an opportune time to showcase your curling club. Get rid of the dust bunnies, polish the silverware, put the beer on ice and speaking of ice, it should be in championship state (actually it should be in championship state all the time but that’s another story).

## Outside Rentals

### Philosophical statements your executive must consider

- a) Should we allow outside rentals to interfere with regularly scheduled play?
- b) When should we schedule rentals at our club?
- c) Are rentals equal members? Are they important for business?

### Key Points to Remember

- a) A successful rental is great for building goodwill and for promoting your facility.
- b) Customer service is critical to repeat business and successful rentals can generate substantial profits
- c) Once you turn on the refrigeration plant and install ice, your fixed costs won’t change whether you have 10 curlers or 1000 curlers. Therefore, it won’t cost you any more to bring in outside rentals

### Tips to Successful Rentals

- a) Rentals deserve good ice conditions. It’s not good enough to say “we’ll pebble in the morning and that will do for the day”. Treat these events as you would playdowns or league play.
- b) At the outset of the season, have dates and times selected specifically for rentals. This will ensure the following:
  - you are increasing business in slack times
  - dates and times don’t conflict with regularly scheduled play
- c) Develop a rental agreement and include the following:
  - a guarantee of the number of players and sheets of ice required
  - food and beverage requirements
  - provisions for obtaining prizes from your pro shop
  - advance deposit
  - name and address for a contact person
  - agreement of liability
  - dress code
  - liquor laws
  - broom rentals, use of sliders of slider tape and cost of pre-rental instruction
  - curling etiquette
  - brief description of how to play the game, scoring etc.

- d) train staff or volunteers on the importance of the rental experience to the overall success of the club

## League Play

Without a doubt, league play is the lifeblood of every curling club. League curling contributes to stability both in membership and to the bottom line. Yet, it seems this is the area where we spend the least amount of time in creativity and most importantly, membership retention

### Philosophical Statements

- Consistency in league play contributes to membership retention. League play should be protected and members should be guaranteed a minimum number of dates.
- League play should be supported by a Playing or Match Committee.

### Key Points to Remember

- For the most part, members appreciate a fixed schedule that won't change
- Be fair to all teams and promote parity as often as possible.

### Tips to Successful League Play

- Don't let ice maintenance interfere with league play. A successful business does not shut down during business hours to clean-up, take inventory, cut golf greens. Yet curling clubs insist on canceling curling to do maintenance!
- Determine ideal starting times for league play. Ask your members what they think
- Promote fifteen minutes per end. Games that go overtime usually cause those curlers who have to follow in the next time slot to become quite annoyed.
- Consider creative times i.e. 6:50PM and 8:50PM instead of 7PM and 9PM.
- Use the ladder system instead of full, year long round robins. Smaller groups using the round robin format where teams moving up and down the ladder promotes parity and ensures that each week games are meaningful and weaker teams aren't getting humiliated. A group of 6 with four rounds of five games per season is ideal. Here is how a ladder system works for an 18 team league on 3 sheets of ice. Repeat for the 2<sup>nd</sup> round after moving teams in the ladder (fig. 2)

Fig. 1

| WEEK | Ice 1 |    |    | Ice 2 |    |    | Ice 3 |    |    |
|------|-------|----|----|-------|----|----|-------|----|----|
| # 1  | A5    | vs | A6 | A3    | vs | A4 | A1    | vs | A2 |
|      | B5    | vs | B6 | B3    | vs | B4 | B1    | vs | B2 |
|      | C5    | vs | C6 | C3    | vs | C4 | C1    | vs | C2 |
| # 2  | B1    | vs | B4 | B6    | vs | B2 | B3    | vs | B5 |
|      | C1    | vs | C4 | C6    | vs | C2 | C3    | vs | C5 |
|      | A1    | vs | A4 | A6    | vs | A2 | A3    | vs | A5 |
| # 3  | C2    | vs | C5 | C1    | vs | C3 | C4    | vs | C6 |
|      | A2    | vs | A5 | A1    | vs | A3 | A4    | vs | A6 |
|      | B2    | vs | B1 | B2    | vs | B3 | B5    | vs | B4 |
| # 4  | A4    | vs | A2 | A5    | vs | A1 | A6    | vs | A3 |
|      | B4    | vs | B2 | B5    | vs | B1 | B6    | vs | B3 |
|      | C4    | vs | C2 | C5    | vs | C1 | C6    | vs | C3 |
| # 5  | B1    | vs | B6 | B2    | vs | B3 | B4    | vs | B5 |
|      | C1    | vs | C6 | C2    | vs | C3 | C4    | vs | C5 |
|      | A1    | vs | A6 | A2    | vs | A3 | A4    | vs | A5 |

**Fig. 1**

| 1 <sup>st</sup> Round |                    | 1 <sup>st</sup> Round |                    | 1 <sup>st</sup> Round |                    |
|-----------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|
| Finish                | 2 <sup>nd</sup> Rd | Finish                | 2 <sup>nd</sup> Rd | Finish                | 2 <sup>nd</sup> Rd |
| A1                    | <b>A1</b>          | B1                    | <b>A4</b>          | C1                    | <b>A6</b>          |
| A2                    | <b>A2</b>          | B2                    | <b>A5</b>          | C2                    | <b>B5</b>          |
| A3                    | <b>A3</b>          | B3                    | <b>B3</b>          | C3                    | <b>B6</b>          |
| A4                    | <b>B1</b>          | B4                    | <b>B4</b>          | C4                    | <b>C4</b>          |
| A5                    | <b>B2</b>          | B5                    | <b>C2</b>          | C5                    | <b>C5</b>          |
| A6                    | <b>C1</b>          | B6                    | <b>C3</b>          | C6                    | <b>C6</b>          |

- Ensure all teams have an equal number of early and late times.
- Develop a prize structure rewarding teams throughout the ladder not just A1.
- Keep and update spare lists. The bane of curling clubs is defaulted games especially for once-a-week curlers. Not only does this hurt your bottom line it exasperates members.
- Listen to your members and their complaints and criticisms. Follow up with a timely response.
- At the start of the season, post the following information:
  - a) Start date, end date and all scheduled games in between including special events;
  - b) The draw for the first set of games and make certain that all skips are called before the 1<sup>st</sup> games of the next draw;
  - c) Curling club regulations i.e. opening and closing times, where to park, pro shop hours;
  - d) League contact and all league rules and regulations including playoff or club championship criteria.

**Tips on developing new league programs**

- Develop programs that may be attractive to groups who might curl in non-prime time, i.e. church groups, shift workers
- Every member should be encouraged to bring guests to curl whether in special promotions like Sandra Schmirler Day or as part of a recreational league activity. Research shows the best source of new members in curling clubs is the current membership.
- Events between clubs and gender or age groups foster club spirit and introduces your membership to others.
- Have an instructor on site for the first few weeks of any league with novice curlers. This attention will cement your relationship with your newer members by showing you care about their experience and their development.
- Listen to your members and their complaints and criticisms. Follow up with a timely response.
- Design some programs to allow new and/or novice members to experience all aspects of the game i.e. all positions, Free Guard Zone strategy.
- Investigate special needs curling such as Special Olympics, wheelchair curling