

Recruiting for the Future

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INTRODUCTION

At the JMO (Joint Morris Organisations) meeting in Hitchin in February 2010 the subject of Side membership came up. In round figures the membership of the three Morris Organisations (Morris Federation, Morris Ring and Open Morris) had fallen from 900 to 700 in the past ten years and it was noted that many Sides were existing on minimum numbers or, in a few cases, even less.

It was agreed to draft a paper to be circulated to all member Sides of the three organisations on the subject of recruiting new members and to do this we needed first to hold a workshop / conference to enable Sides to put forward their ideas and learn from other Sides what had and had not worked for them.

As a result a meeting was held in Rickmansworth on Sunday the 3rd of October where 25 delegates representing Sides from all over the United Kingdom and members of each of the three Organisations were present.

CAMPAIGN

The first thing to consider is the type of campaign your Side wants to run. This could be, for example, an all out effort to recruit new members with a specific recruiting campaign or an on-going search for new members.

Each Side will differ in its approach and what may work for one Side may not be quite so efficient for another and will, perhaps, not work at all for a third.

The on going recruiting is essential as, due to “natural wastage”, a Side will lose members over the years for a number of reasons which can include Side members moving away, illness or injury, simply loss of interest or a host of other reasons. These losses need to be replaced on a regular basis.

Whilst the massive campaign is thus not to be ignored (especially if your Side is very low in numbers) it does (or hopefully will) result in a large number of new members joining at one time and you will then have to consider how best to train them while keeping the interest and enthusiasm of your existing members. It is much easier to teach two or three new members in normal practice!

You should thus either have an on going recruitment policy or, if you do decide on a massive recruitment campaign, you should follow this up with an on going policy to cope with the loss of Side members, for what ever reason, over the years.

Such a decision will form part of your Side’s **Recruitment Strategy** which needs to be decided in advance of taking any action.

STRATEGY – agree what you want to achieve and how.

It became clear very early on in the conference that before going out to get new members, the Side (either the Officers or a selected sub-committee or even the whole Side) needs to set out a **written** Strategy.

It is essential to decide on your strategy in advance and this will include how you are going to find new members, what you are going to do about training them and a number of other factors, including budget, resources and available skills.

If what you decide on is found to be lacking or simply does not work then revisit your strategy and see if it needs altering or totally revising – what works for one Side may not work in the same way for another.

Age – are you looking for all age groups or are you looking to recruit a younger element into your Side to keep the Side going for the next 40 years?

If you are planning a massive campaign, is your Foreman geared up to taking on a large batch of new dancers, will you encourage them to your normal practice or have a different night for “trainees”? If your campaign is to be on-going, you need to decide on the resources being used and how to use them most effectively.

Recruiting under-16s can provide separate problems around safeguarding, CRBs and responsible adults, although setting up a “young Side” to feed dancers into the main body does have attractions for some Sides; however, you do need to have Side members who are committed to providing the training.

Your strategy thus has to answer the following questions although some Sides may wish to include other headings in the strategy list.

What sort of campaign?

How much money can the Side afford to put to this?

What methods will you use to find new members?

What age group / age limits do you want to impose?

How will you train them?

JMO INVOLVEMENT

Another topic which was raised throughout the meeting was the involvement of the three Morris Organisations acting in union under the JMO heading.

It was felt that a National Campaign needed to be considered with a one number / e-mail address which would be used to direct the prospective dancer or musician to their local Side. This could also be used for the transfer of information about prospective members between Sides.

A National Image and Identity needed to be considered including a new national Morris Logo.

A great help would be the production in large numbers of A4 leaflets printed on one side and left blank on the other which Sides could use having overprinted them before folding them to DL size
($\frac{1}{3}$ A4)

Another thought was beer mats which could be left in pubs and clubs but this could only work in conjunction with the “one number” set up detailed above because of the need to produce large quantities to be economical.

TOOLS

One of the Strategy decisions a Side needs to make is what “tools” you will use to recruit new members and how much you can spend on such tools.

Perhaps appointing a Recruitment Officer (RO) would be a good start.

Of course, if you are dancing out in your area, this is the best recruiting tool you have as long as you use it!

Let the public see what a good time you are having and spot likely prospective members in the audience and tell them what fun you have. You could also use Facebook or other social networking sites to tell all your friends what a great time you have Morris dancing – you never know, some of them might like to join you!

The RO and Side members generally need to have something either to give out or leave at a decided location (see “events” below) and, again, each Side will have a different idea and / or budget which will determine which of the following can be used to help to spread the word:

Leaflets

Many Sides may have access to a “duplex” laser printer and thus with Word in three column mode you can print your own. This has the advantage of being able to print them off as required and updating on a regular basis.

An alternative, but more expensive option, is to have leaflets printed professionally. For a one off mass recruiting drive this may be more economical due to the numbers required and will certainly look more professional.

Leaflets are most popular form of advertising and can include a page about the Morris, details of your Side, details of events you are dancing at this year and can also include photos of your Side dancing out.

Posters

A4 posters are easily produced on most computers but, again, watch out for quality – remember, the poster you produce reflects your Side.

Adverts

Adverts in the local press are normally free in the “what’s on” page but can incur a cost if a block is taken. Always go for editorial at the same time if you are paying for an advert – local papers are always looking for copy and, if it is well written, will often lift your text straight into the paper.

Press releases

If you send out a press release always include a separate sheet with “Notes for Editors” which can include a short paragraph about the Morris, another about the history of your Side, a note of where you meet and that you are always looking for new members. If the editor wants to expand on your press release he / she will take the information from this sheet. Free publicity!

Visiting cards

Have visiting cards printed with an invitation to new members and hand them out when you are dancing. These can serve a dual purpose of course as you can give them to pubs you are dancing at and use them to give to someone who wants your Side to dance somewhere.

These need to be professionally printed and each member of the Side should be issued with a small supply to give out whilst dancing out.

Drop cards

These are bigger than visiting cards (normally A6) and can be printed on one or both sides. They can simply invite the reader to a special event or to a normal practice.

These can be a halfway house between a leaflet and a visiting card or aimed at a specific event.

Sign-up sheets.

Perhaps one for the RO!

Have a “sign-up sheet” on a clip board with details of the normal practice night or a special recruiting event, asking for the name, e-mail and telephone number of prospective new members. Pass this around the audience at a dance-out and make sure that you contact the people who have signed up – some will have done it for a laugh, some because their wife/girlfriend thought it would be a good idea, and others because they genuinely feel they’d like to have a go!

A good tip here is to start it off with two or three names of existing Side members as no one likes to be the first on such a list!

GET THEM INVOLVED

Not all Sides like the idea but a dance at the end of a session in which you invite the public to join in (not too complicated!) is a great way to spot prospective members.

EVENTS

Having decided in your Strategy meeting who you are looking for and what “tools” you are going to use, you need to decide what sort of events or displays you are going to employ to encourage the unsuspecting prospective member to join your side.

Some of the items listed may well benefit other Sides in the future as well as your own Side in the short term; others will, hopefully, find you members for life.

Again, if you have decided on both a massive recruitment drive AND an on going recruitment policy, you may want to use different ideas for both.

This list is not exhaustive; there will be many other ways to use your tools and you should also remember that some Sides will prefer to try one method of recruiting whilst others will prefer something quite different.

If you set out to try most of the ways listed you are almost bound to get some new members. Not all these ideas will, however, be right for every Side.

Open days / evenings

Some Sides have open days at a weekend. This is great if it works but if you are planning such an event it may be better to use a normal practice night so that you know those who come will be able to commit themselves regularly to that night.

Use your tools to highlight the date, send out press releases to the local papers. Get Side members to put drop cards through doors in your area or give them out at railway stations, pubs you dance at, local libraries, etc.

The success of an open evening or day will depend on how many people know about it and no one will come if you don't tell them you are holding it.

Get the Side to wear kit that evening and lay on refreshments including tea and coffee. Have someone give a SHORT talk about the Morris and your Side and put on a couple of display dances then get the prospective members up for a SIMPLE dance.

Don't forget to tell them what a great time you have and detail some of the highlights of your year. Take them to the pub after practice, if that's what you normally do. Make sure you get the names and telephone numbers of anyone who comes through the door.

Friends

Many of us have one – some even two. Why not get them to join? The best recommendation is a personal one.

Dance Outs

The best time to recruit is when the public can see you having fun.

Your RO (when not dancing of course) should provide a leaflet to a prospective member and invite them to a practice night. Get them to join in your “public” dance at the end.

Poster displays

You can display posters at libraries, local museums, youth clubs, sports centres, colleges, Universities, hospitals – the list is endless.

Most such places will be happy to display your poster and leaflets for a limited period at least.

If you have a good relationship with the Manager, Landlord or Landlady at a pub you dance at, or where you go after practice, you can ask him or her to display a poster and leaflets or drop cards in the bar.

Local Press

A specific press release aimed at a recruiting event is always worthwhile to both local papers and local radio.

Making “friends” with a member of the Editorial staff is always useful.

Workshops

If you are asked to run a workshop at a folk festival, ask those taking part if they already belong to a Side. If not, find out where they live and, when you get home, let the local Side know. They may well return the favour one day!

If we all do this we will not lose prospective dancers to the Morris as a whole and you never know – you might make all the difference to his / her local Side.

Adult Education

The subject of Adult Education courses was discussed. However, this needs to be done in conjunction with the local Adult Education centre and will probably involve a number of Side members getting involved. There is also a possible issue around accreditation.

If you can become involved in the local Adult Education programme, to run a “taster” course for example, it could result in some of those on the course joining your Side at a later date.

Ceilidhs and Folk evenings

If your Side members go to such events then this is an ideal time to take leaflets and distribute them either by just leaving them on tables or actually talking to people and inviting them to a practice. If you can get to dance at a local ceilidh as an interval spot, you can use this as an opportunity for recruitment as well.

Practise out

If you are dancing out at a pub in your area you can always save money on your practice hall by holding your practice at that pub the week before. Wear jeans, Side tee shirts and bells and tell the locals that you will be putting on a full performance the following week. See if anyone is interested in joining you!

Schools, Scouts, Guides etc.

Sides are sometimes asked to provide a display dance or workshop session for such organisations.

There are two aspects to this (unless you are planning to set up or already have a junior Side).

The first is long term – the youngsters may well join a Morris Side in the future so that is a point to remember.

The second is that although the youngsters may be too young to join your Side, they have parents and teachers – you might recruit them – it is worth a try.

Universities and Colleges

Here you can advertise and may well get new members but remember, 75% of those attending will live a long way from the university they attend so you may be recruiting for the Morris in the long term and ultimately for other Sides. Such Side members can be a valuable asset to your Side in the short term though, and if you keep up the recruiting..... Many Sides exist in just this way.

WEBSITES

This subject has been left out of all the above topics as the internet came up many times during the day under different headings.

Most, if not all Sides have a website. In addition to the normal things such as details of your Side, history and dance dates, it can be used as a direct recruiting aid or to publicise a specific recruiting event such as an open evening.

It is VITAL to keep your website updated – no one wants to see what you were doing three years ago!

If you are looking for young members it is important to get a youngster to check the wording and to advise if the style is to “old and stuffy”.

We are grateful to Judith Proctor for the following tips.

(The most important ones are the first paragraph, lots of links to you and updating regularly)

1. *Make sure all the key words are in the first paragraph of your home page. There are two reasons for this:*

A. Google takes more account of the first paragraph.

B. That's all that people will see on the Google search.

For example:

Anonymous Morris

Anonymous Morris are a brand new Morris dance side based in Anytown, Hogshire. We're currently seeking dancers and musicians, age 18-28, to join us for ...

www.anonymousmorris.co.uk/ - Cached

My key words were Morris, dance, Anytown, Hogshire. new, age 18-28 (and they all appear in the text on Google.)

- 2. Update your site regularly. Google ranks you higher if your site is current.*
- 3. The title of your page is important.*
- 4. Google ignores meta tags. (If you don't know what they are, don't worry about it.) They've been so abused by porn sites that they are now valueless.*
- 5. Links from other sites are important, but don't subscribe to link farms (spammers who offer to get you thousands of links). Consider which sites have a logical connection to your own and ask them if they would link to you. Ideally, write them a short piece of text.*
- 6. Links to you will have far more value if they have appropriate text around them. An ideal link will have text with most of your key words next to it.*
- 7. Link to sites that are *relevant* to you.*
- 8. Do a Google search for your key words (eg. Morris dance Anytown) and see which sites come ahead of you. Clearly these are the sites that you most need to link to you.*
- 9. If you've changed your web address, you will need to use Google to hunt down every single site that links to your old address and ask them to change to your new one. (One of our local sides is currently cursed by this - Google leads people to the old site)*
- 10. Ask your Morris Organisation to put links on their membership list.*
- 11. Make sure your web address is listed on Side Finder.*

CONCLUSION

Whatever you try to get new members must be done with enthusiasm and determination.

You should devise a recruitment strategy with the whole side and seek their full cooperation with the project whether it is a one-off event or an on-going recruitment policy.

Remember, if you decide on a one-off event you have to plan what to do if you suddenly find you have a large number of new members – don't wait until you have them to think about it but plan in advance - use the "what if" principle.

If you do have a "one-off" event without the back-up of a regular recruiting policy then you will have to repeat the exercise – perhaps every year!

If you find a method of recruiting which works (or have already found one) which is not listed in this working sheet, please let us know and we can include it in any future updates.

Last of all, remember

You can't sell if you don't tell