

Need Members? Consider Facebook.

By Jon Mielke

How does your club advertise Learn-to-Curl open houses? Over the years, my home club has used all the traditional promotional tools – newspaper ads, boulevard signs on the busy street that runs by the club, public service announcements, and even washroom advertising. They all worked, to some extent, but it was getting harder and harder to generate attendance, especially since most of our club's members had already invited their friends and family and co-workers to try curling in prior years.

This year the club tried something new – it spent \$2,000 on two Facebook promotions, one at the start of the season and one corresponding with the Olympics. It was well worth the investment and may be something that your club wants to consider.

Up front, I confess that I am not a techy person. Everything that I am about to tell you is based on what others in my club did and/or told me. But the results were astounding and worth passing along.

The first thing your club needs to have is a Facebook page that contains details on the event(s) that you are promoting. A website is also highly recommended, but it is not an absolute necessity for Facebook advertising. Your club's Facebook page (and website) is where people will be directed if they click on the ad that you eventually put in place.

Once you have a Facebook page established, you use that site to place an ad. There is also a help number for first-time users. You can post a picture and script and prescribe recipient demographics. In our case, we targeted people between the ages of 25 and 50 that live within 50 miles of Bismarck.

My club set a budget limit of \$1,000 per campaign and chose an option that charged up to 60 cents for each recipient that clicked on a link that directed them to either the club's website or Facebook page. You can also set a time limit on the ad. Once related costs reach your prescribed budget or the deadline date, the ad will close. A Facebook dash board will enable you to watch ad results in real time. In our club's case, the initial ad was viewed by nearly 30,000 Facebook users and over 1,000 of these individuals clicked on the ad to get more information.

Three things amazed me when I showed up to help instruct at the first Learn-to-Curl session. First, there were lots of people there. Facebook had obviously reached people and those who were interested showed up. The second thing that struck me was that attendees were not there with club members, they came on their own. Club members can certainly recruit new curlers, but so can today's social media.

The other thing that really impressed me was the age of the people who came. They were not old like me – they were young, energetic, enthusiastic, and pretty athletic. They were just the kind of new blood that many clubs may need.

We ran three sessions at the start of the season and three in conjunction with the Olympics. We started each session with a brief warm room presentation and had attendees sign in (name, phone number, and e-mail address). At the end of each session, we asked people who were interested in signing up for league play to visit with one of the instructors and their interest was noted on the sign-in sheet. They were asked if they were interested as an individual or if they already had a team of players and what nights worked for them. They were also invited to come back for an “advanced” learn-to-curl night so they could get some additional introductory instruction and play a few more ends before jumping into league play.

The real proof of success for all of this investment (both cash and manpower) is new members. In our case, the pre-season learn-to-curl effort brought in twelve new teams and several individual members. The Olympic effort brought in several more new teams that participated in a four-week mini-season. With 70-80 new members, the \$2,000 Facebook promotions paid huge dividends and is something that is being planned again to kick-off the new season. We may have to create new leagues at non-traditional times to accommodate all the new members – a nice problem to have!

It is also worth noting that, for the first time ever in our club’s 32 year history, we charged people to participate in the Olympic learn-to-curl sessions. It appears that the \$10 fee did not hurt attendance and it nearly covered related promotional expenses. Could it be that if it is free, it may not worth anything, but if you charge for it, it must be valuable? Clubs all over the country have been finding out that curling has value and that they should not be selling themselves short.

Social media like Facebook is outside the traditional promotional box for senior statesmen like me, but it is how today’s younger generation communicates and participates. It may be something that your club wants to consider as it plans for the upcoming season.

For more information on the Capital Curling Club’s Facebook promotional efforts or related learn-to-curl sessions, please contact:

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Until next time – Good Curling!

Jon Mielke is a Level III instructor and a Level III coach. He a member of Bismarck’s Capital Curling Club and a 2012 inductee into the United States Curling Hall of Fame. All of his previous articles are available in USA Curling’s website under Clubs – Curling News – Columnists.