

Joint Morris Organisation

MORRIS FEDERATION • MORRIS RING ♦ OPEN MORRIS

RECRUITING NEW MEMBERS

WHY RECRUIT?

Perhaps a silly question but a Side that stops recruiting will die. It is essential to take any opportunity to get new members for your Side, both dancers and musicians. People leave a Side for a number of reasons including finding other hobbies and moving away from the area.

Not everyone in your Side will want to help but it is important to get as many of your Side as possible involved.

You may be doing some of the following but you should try all these ideas and keep at it. You will always get a couple of new members if you follow these ideas and keep trying. Best of luck.

Of the many ideas below, some will work for some Sides and others for other Sides. Some ideas will fail one year and succeed the next.

If you have someone prepared to do the job, appoint someone as a Recruiting Officer but It is the responsibility of every member of a Side to assist with the recruiting process. Try to get the name, telephone number and e-mail address of anyone who shows an interest and follow the meeting up with an e-mail inviting them to come to a practice.

It is important to keep on trying and if at first you don't succeed, try, try again.

You should also remember that it is important to make new commers feel welcome and part of the Side.

PUBLICITY CARDS

Many Sides have leaflets or cards giving information about the Side. The best method is an A6 or postcard size card with a photo of the Side on one side and details of practice nights, web site and other information on the other.

They can be quite reasonable if ordered in quantity and are a handy size for your members to carry with them when dancing out to hand out to potential new members.

Make sure, if you are ordering a large number, that the information is not likely to change – best to direct the reader to your web site (if you have one – most Sides seem to these days)

You can always leave a small quantity at your local library, colleges, village halls, community centres, and at other locations (with permission of course) and they can be used in conjunction with other projects below.

It is important when designing your cards to make sure that they attract attention and inform the reader of your web site details, where you practice and how to book you for an event.

FREE PUBLICITY

Free publicity can be obtained using press releases. To be honest, writing a press release is an art and it depends how it is written as to how it will (or not) be used.

A well written press release will be used exactly as you have sent it. Always a good idea to send a photo or two of the Side with the release – a good photo is worth a thousand words.

It is important to time the issue of the press release – local papers are interested in news not history!

Find out the name of the reporter who covers your area and keep him / her supplied with regular information but don't overdo it. Once a month is a good timescale.

WEB SITES AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Setting up a web site is something most, if not all, Sides have done and it is a great way to let the outside world know what your Side is up to and you can direct people to your web site on visiting cards and in other ways.

The most important thing is to keep it up to date as an out of date web site is worse than not having one at all.

Not everyone has the knowledge to do this so find a member of your Side who is and have them add new dates where you are dancing out as soon as you know about them.

Social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, is also a way to get people interested in your Side and it is important to put frequent messages on saying where you are dancing and what a fun time you had at your last dance out etc.

Again, if you set up a Facebook Page, or similar, for your Side, it is important to put a message on there on a regular basis however the whole Side can do this.

RECRUITING WHILST DANCING OUT

As mentioned above, the best time to recruit new members is whilst dancing out. This is where you can hand out your publicity and chat to potential new members. You may never see them again but every so often but, once in a while, you will see a new person at practice. It is important to make new members feel welcome but do not pressure them into joining – let them decide that Morris is a fun hobby and you will see them again.

This is one of the times the cards mentioned above will come in handy as you can give them out to your audience but don't just hand out cards but talk to them and see if any of them might be interested in coming along to a practice.

Dancing out locally is the best chance of recruiting members for your Side. Such dance outs should be advertised in advance and at the location concerned so you might get someone seeing your performance advertised in advance, comes along and give you the chance to recruit them.

Another advantage is that you will impress the venue with your activity and the (hopefully) additional business that you generate for them.

PRACTICE OUTDOORS

In the summer, you can practice in your local park or in the car park of a local pub.

This both saves rent on your practice hall and gives the opportunity to talk to those who stop to watch and get them to join.

Such a practice can be in full kit, "half kit" (Side Sweatshirt and hats and bells) or normal practice clothing – "half kit" is perhaps the best.

You can also advise any watchers of other local events you are dancing at – these can be produced on your printer at home as you will not need that many, a couple of dozen at the most for each event.

JOINING IN DANCE

There will be occasions when you can invite members of your audience to join in a dance. Important, of course, to have a simple dance up your sleeve for this.

You can keep a look out for those who are good at Morris and look as though they might like to join you.

Stick dances are the best joining in dances as they are much more fun for those who have not danced before.

OPEN EVENINGS

Many Sides hold open evenings which are preceded by posters, notices on social media and flyers.

Plan the evening with three simple dances, perform them first for your visitors and then do the dance again involving them - I suggest you display a one dance and then get your visitors to join in with the same dance which you will need to run through stage by stage and then finally run through the whole thing.

Sometimes they are successful sometimes not. It is important to stress the “keep fit” side of dancing and to get existing members to talk to them about the fun things your Side get up to.

Have Side members ready to “buddy up” with a visitor and encourage them.

Some Sides turn up in kit on such evenings and others come in whatever they normally wear for practice.

It is a bit of an effort but the former will have more effect on those who turn up.

Do not get disheartened if no one turns up.

LOCAL SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

A good source of new recruits is the sixth form of local schools and colleges.

Remember that the Duke of Edinburgh’s Award scheme accepts Morris as a project for the scheme.

You will have to produce a report on their abilities for them to send in but this is only the once.

This is a great way to recruit young members to the Side but do be aware that they may disappear off to university and not return! Also, if under the age of 18, you have to follow the protection of minors’ advice.

Other possible sources of new members are Sports groups, Community Centres, Art groups, Scouts, Young Farmers, and other dance groups. In addition, you can ask local Folk Groups, libraries and Supermarkets to display your cards.

GIVING TALKS

Not many Sides do this but it works – some of the time. At least you will make some money for your Side if nothing else.

You can put on your web site that you can offer talks about the History of Morris and your Side in particular.

The best way to do this is to put on a slide show either with slides and a slide projector or, the more modern way, using a computer with a programme such as Power Point connected to a projector. This is an expensive bit of kit but you could always apply to your County Councillor for a grant from their locality budget.

The person giving the talk needs to be good as a speaker and the talk can be interrupted every so often with a display dance. Best not to have the person giving the talk to be involved in a dance.

You can offer this talk to all sorts of local groups and charge, say, £50 for the evening (or afternoon) and can contact groups through the local Council who keep a record of groups prepared to give talks.

REASONS FOR JOINING

You will need to encourage a prospective new member by telling them the advantages of dancing.

Tell them what else you do as a group, social events, folk festivals, local pub nights etc.

There are many reasons you can give for joining.

Keeping fit, having fun, keeping an old tradition alive, joining a group who have fun.

WHAT ELSE

Make other halves feel welcome – they may in due course decide to join but, in the interim, you want them on side.

Try all of the above ideas and keep trying them – the future of your Side may well depend on it.

Best wishes to all Sides who try some or all of the above suggestions.

Michael Stimpson

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