

Membership

The best practices noted on this page deal with the area of Membership

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A. Membership Surveys

Soliciting members-at-large input on a recurring basis can help assure Division Boards that they are providing relevant technical content and services to their constituents. The simplest and most objective way to gain this perspective is through the proven technique of surveys.

At least two Divisions have turned to the use of electronic membership surveys to gain input from their general membership on a variety of issues and subjects. This real-time member input can be used to gauge Division performance, to test new ideas, and to measure interest in new technical topics. Use of these point-and-click web page surveys--rather than paper-and-pencil forms-- eliminates mailing costs, gives higher response rates, and cuts turnaround times to just days, resulting in faster decision making capabilities. Contact SPE Headquarters for a white paper detailing how to adapt this practice for your Division or Section. (Injection Molding and Medical Plastics.)

B. Retaining Existing or Lapsed Members

Often, it's easier to keep an existing customer than to recruit a new one, so considerable efforts are being made at the Division level to help keep existing SPE "customers".

Many Divisions use a formal "Welcome" letter to new or renewed members, in order to key in on and reinforce the value of four or five key benefits of being a member of the Division--e.g. ANTEC programs, Newsletter content, Consultants Lists, Special Division Events or Conferences, etc. Typically, these letters are produced as a self-mailer and mailed by the Division Membership Chairperson to each month's new members, using the mailing labels provided each month by SPE Headquarters. (Injection Molding, Medical Plastics, and other Divisions.) At least one Division also includes a formal brochure that details additional member benefits. (Extrusion.)

At least one Division is sending its formal "Welcome" letters by low-cost e-mail (using e-addresses provided by SPE Headquarters), completely eliminating printing and postage costs. (Medical Plastics.)

At least one Division uses a formal "We Don't Want to Lose You" letter that is sent to "lapsed" or non-renewing Division members, reminding them of the value of being a member of the Division and asking them, once again, to consider renewing their lapsed membership. In form, the self-mailer closely resembles the "Welcome" letter, but uses slightly modified introductory and closing paragraphs. (Injection Molding.)

For special, focused retention programs, SPE Headquarters can provide targeted mailing lists based on any pre-specified criteria. For example, your Division might want to put special focus on trying to regain non-renewed members who had been SPE member for over five years of SPE membership. These reports can also include mailing labels and/or e-mail addresses.

Membership Chairs should also consider actively publicizing the SPE's multi-year membership option, providing members with savings while helping to reduce long-term member turnover or "churn".

Some divisions are active in sponsoring or collating various publications and Consultants Lists, which are provided to members at reduced or no charge. (Extrusion, Injection Molding, and others.)

For additional ideas and examples that can also be adapted for your Division's needs, consult the SPE's "Membership Chairperson's Manual", sent each year to Membership Chairs and also available on request from SPE Headquarters.

C. Recruiting New Members

While the SPE is well known among most plastics professionals, each year many new potential members emerge from the university system and from movement into the industry from other industries. So, the job of recruiting new members is an on-going one that includes getting the message out.

Several Divisions have developed stand-alone brochures that do an excellent job of informing non-members of the Division's mission, its recurring activities, and the benefits of becoming and remaining a Division member. These materials are most often distributed at ANTEC, industry conferences (both SPE and non-SPE), and through independent or joint direct mailings. (Marketing & Management, Medical Plastics, Polymer Analysis, Product Design & Development, and Rotomolding.)

One Division offers a well-produced brochure, titled "Member Services", a what-do-we-offer-you promotion piece that is distributed to both potential new members and existing members. (Extrusion.)

D. Networking Events

As any good sales person will affirm, every personal contact is an opportunity to sell...and Division meetings are especially well suited to recruit new members and sponsors.

Several Divisions use their open "receptions" as a recruiting tool, attracting potential new members to the event through word-of-mouth and invitation, as well as offering the opportunity to reinforcing the value of Division membership to existing members. Most often, these events are held as a combination hors d'oeuvres/cash bar event, either before or after the Division's Annual Business Meeting at ANTEC. (Extrusion; Injection Molding; Thermoforming; Vinyl; etc.)

These receptions also offer the opportunity to raise funds from industry in the form of financial "sponsorships" that can be used to expand the size of the event and offset related costs (or fund additional student scholarships). The increased visibility of industry suppliers at these events helps validate the importance of the Division's activities in general. At the same time, the sponsors are offered display tables and logo visibility above a minimum \$-sponsorship level, thus gaining visibility to a very targeted audience. (Injection Molding, Thermoforming.)

Other Divisions that hold conferences other than ANTEC also use opening receptions, partially funded by sponsorships, as a recruiting tool. (Thermoforming, Vinyl, Color & Appearance, Marketing & Management.)

E. SPE Membership Chairperson's Manual

Don't overlook existing resource materials from SPE Headquarters...

The SPE "Membership Chairperson's Manual", available on request from SPE Headquarters, provides a number of other interesting ideas for recruiting members, retaining members, and getting the message out that membership in SPE is a valuable professional asset.

For further information about this example and how your SPE Division or Section can adapt this Best Practice, contact Tricia McKnight