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(Central/South)**

## Connecting with Interested Newcomers

So, you've set up your social media page (see SOA website news Feb 17), and thought about how you present yourself at events (see "First Impressions" SCORE Mar 17), now what?

### What's next for interested newcomers to orienteering?

A person may have attended an event or signed up to the mailing list but, as we all know, this doesn't mean they will join - some do, some don't. Some who join are members for a year but then drop off. Let's accept that some individuals or families, despite how interested they seem, will never take the next step of joining a club, and that is okay. What *can* we do to encourage interested newcomers to join and become a valued member of the club? Perhaps the term "valued member" is where we need to begin. With most sports and hobbies, you start because you like the look of it, and you stay because you've made friends, had fun, and feel like you are a part of something. Orienteering is no different from any other sport in that respect, and the sooner you can integrate someone, the better the chance of keeping them!



*Friendly faces and pre-event coaching go a long way toward making newcomers feel welcome and confident.*

**We all like to feel included, welcomed and valued; what could your club do to ensure that interested people feel just that?**

- **Personal contact:** As mentioned by Johannes Petersen (RDO North) in the March issue of SCORE, the things that happen after someone new attends an event are important. Are they

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simply added to a mailing list? Are they sent any information? I've found the best way to engage with a potential member is to speak to them personally at an event or email them afterwards. Email communication needs to be friendly, consistent and tailored to the person you are emailing, so that it doesn't feel like another mailing list email - whilst avoiding overloading anyone with information. This contact may need to continue over several weeks or months in order to encourage someone along to their second event.

- **A tear-off leaflet:** Your EOD (Entry On the Day) form could be a tear-off from part of a bigger leaflet. This could contain information on what the course names mean, how to understand map symbols, or what other events are coming up, as well as where to find out more. Having a form like this ensures that all new participants at your event have something to take away and follow up on later. It's even better if they can have a conversation with a friendly club volunteer, but when you have lots of new people at your events, you inevitably miss some.
- **Enquiries need a prompt response:** If someone does want to find out more, is it clear on your website how they can do this - is there a named person they can contact? Will they get a swift response if they do email? It might seem obvious, but the easier you make it for people to find and receive information, the more people you will get joining up. The same applies on social media; you need to be prepared to respond quickly to any messages your page receives.
- **Create a committee role:** The most sensible way of dealing with any enquiries is to have a club member assigned to this role. This person would be responsible for knowing who people are (both new members and potential members), and for identifying which people they can support to integrate into the club. They need to be the one to give that personal touch. It's one of the main advantages of our smaller sport - without much effort, we can connect effectively with people who are interested. That may sound daunting, but the more people you interact with, the more people are likely to join, and the larger your volunteer pool to then do some of the interacting.

Some may argue that this is the job of a membership secretary, which most clubs have already. But how many of those have a role description which actually covers the responsibilities outlined here? It doesn't have to be a membership secretary's job; it could be another position entirely, but it is one which should be there. If you'd like to update your club's committee roles search for "Job Description Templates" on the SOA website, or get in touch with Johannes or myself for more advice.

- **Pre-event coaching:** Some clubs have had great success offering coaching immediately before local events. This has the double value of getting to know prospective/newer members, as well as helping to ensure people enjoy our sport, because they know what they are doing.

### Why do you need to contact interested individuals?

You must give people the information they need in order to come back. There are so many other sport activity opportunities out there which they can find out about easily; we need to be doing the same. You could email about an event, a social, or a training run. People may feel that they are too novice to attend a particular event, or be nervous about turning up at a place where they will know no one - specific contact with someone in the club could make all the difference.

Once a potential member joins your club, the communication must continue, to ensure they feel part of things, or they may become one of the members who drop off after a year. There will be more advice on this coming soon; watch this space! If you have any questions about anything in this article get in touch with Johannes ([Johannes@scottish-orienteering.org](mailto:Johannes@scottish-orienteering.org)) or myself ([Rona@scottish-orienteering.org](mailto:Rona@scottish-orienteering.org)).

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