

The really rough guide to being a...

**PR Officer** 



# Welcome to the really rough guide...

and to your role as a Voluntary Public Relations Officer (PRO) for The Camping and Caravanning Club.

This booklet was written by and for voluntary PROs who may not yet aspire to speaking on the radio or giving newspaper interviews but are in a role which enables them to promote their own DA/Section. Currently you may not have even considered selling Club membership on a recruiting stand or writing press releases but, as time goes by and you see the benefits that you can bring to your DA, Section or Region, you will want to expand your skill levels in selling your Club.

So what does your role entail? People have been told when being recruited for the PRO position that they could do as much or as little as they wanted and, over time, added skills and activities on as they became needed or useful. However this role is often overlooked and in reality is one of the most important positions on the Committee.

Try and think of it this way. Your DA, Section or Region is really a business. You have a Chairman, a Finance Director and a very unique product - DA/Section/Region camping. You could even say that you have shareholders - other members who may not be on a committee but have a vested interest in the continual smooth running of what you do. If you imagine yourself as the Director of Communications then you may be able to see that your place on the committee is absolutely key to its success.

Any company with a product to sell will be shouting about what it does through advertising, promotions, even giving away free samples to attract customers. There will be a budget and resources will be made available for marketing. You will carry out research to find out who your prospective customers are, what they want, and where to find them.



So do we do all this as DA/Section/Region PROs? If you were to go to your next committee meeting and ask them what the budget for marketing is for the forthcoming year you'd get a blank look. The Camping and Caravanning Club spends nearly 5% of its income on external marketing and fulfilment. Add on the costs of producing the magazines, booklets, brochures, Your Place in the Country, website, regalia, etc and the proportion shoots up alarmingly. Is the Club justified in spending so much money on self promotion? The Accountants certainly think so since they can evaluate exactly how well all of this is working for them — membership and therefore overall monies is up which enables us to plough back even more into our Club.

Unfortunately DA/Section/Region budgets are substantially lower than Greenfields House and we need to cut our cloth accordingly. What you have on offer to you though includes free advertising space

through *Out and About* and *You are Invited* so always make the most of them. We can also publish websites at very little cost – it is possible to buy a domain name for a few pounds a year and many of the DAs/Sections/Regions are already offering this as a service to their members. And as for the PR side, writing press releases to notify local people of what you're up to, speaking with the media and so forth, it's all free apart from the time.

So what does The Club do to support you, the *Public Relations Officer Handbook* has been prepared to give you in depth information when dealing with third parties, ie the media, prospective members and the general public. It has been written by Public Relations specialists and should be considered as the definitive guide to being a PRO for The Camping and Caravanning Club. Training is also offered and the Marketing team are on-hand to support you with shows, information and such like.

# How to make the most out of your role

#### **Out and About**

Out and About is published monthly and should contain all the information a new member needs to find out about local meets and what to expect when they get there. It may be a venue that has been used regularly but you shouldn't assume that people know the details particularly if they're new. Try and put as much information in as you can. We've all seen descriptions that say; "contact the committee for more details" and then don't give any. Spell it out in black and white.

The *Out and About* deadlines don't make your job easy as you could be dealing with a meet five months in advance and details can sometimes be difficult to come by beforehand however that information is essential. Speak to the stewards and get some information from them - if they can't or won't tell you what is happening on site, why not tell people about the local attractions or places where they can buy or sample local produce.

Another thing to bear in mind is keep the language simple - you might know what an American Supper is - will everyone else? A regular meet has been advertised as "The last Easterly of the year" or even "The first Easterly of the Year" with no explanation of what an Easterly was — does anyone outside that event know what it's about and would anyone truly go to the trouble to find out... these are the things you must consider. Keep it plain, keep it simple and give as much information each time you do it after all, it could be a new member reading the entry.

#### You are Invited

Your entries for You are Invited are limited to six meets a year so not only do you have to carefully select which meets you want to promote but also the wording that you need to use. Something to think about is the existing popularity of a site. Some of our DA sites would never be put in You are Invited because they are already very popular meets and the fields aren't large enough to cater for more..

There isn't much space to advertise meets so you need to make the most of it. Wording is very

important and must be positive and encouraging. Would you go to this meet; "don't forget your wellies - if it's anything like last year you'll need them". This wording was used to advertise a Youth Weekend which was subsequently very poorly attended!

You are Invited entries should be sent in by the 8th of each month, two months in advance. For example, by the 8th March you should have submitted entries for the May magazine. When emailing (outandabout@campingandcaravanning club.co.uk) you should receive an automatic email response within a few minutes saying that your email has arrived and is being processed. If you don't, then your entry has not reached The Club. Check and double check the email address as it's imperative that it get's through. If you don't get an automated reponse or the email bounces back then call Greenfields House and speak with Marketing Services.

#### Your DA/Section

What does your DA/Section/Region want for the future, where do you want to be in five years time and how are you going to get there? Many of you are now struggling with numbers and often this affects election times when it's increasingly hard to find the right people for the roles. Members move on or get older and it's getting harder to preserve a long-lasting future for your way of camping.

Eastern Region was asked to provide quiet meets so for one year, every other weekend as a quiet meet with the intervening meets having something laid on. Guess what happened? Every other weekend that a very quiet meet was held, very few members turned up - even the ones that asked for quiet meets didn't go to them! The desire to want small meets, isn't a long term solution, it doesn't help the landowner where you hold your events or your funds.

If your DA/Section/Region has a healthy influx of new members then you will have a large pool of people to call on, not only for committee work, but also for day to day running of meets. One of the great things is that you get to meet people from all walks of life and the more people bringing those key skills and enthusiasm the better.

# **Your Target Audience**

So who should you be trying to attract to your DA/Section/Region? Put your marketing hat on and ask around. What was the typical age that you and your fellow campers joined your DA/Section/Region. Ask them about their family situation at the time as well. It's probable that the vast majority of them will have been in their mid thirties. There will have been young children in tow as well. The biggest section of new members to The Club is in exactly the same age range - 48% of all new members in fact. Would your DA/Section/Region now be attractive to that group of people?

There should be a place for everyone and you need to think about this. If you're DA/Section/
Region is sliding towards an older membership, you may find that younger members will not stay with you for long. Again, put your research hat on, what was it that made you join, perhaps it was that the children were safe to to come and go as they pleased, that they palled up with others of their age which gave you the time to spend with other like minded people. That's part of what the new members want as well - a relaxing weekend knowing that their children are entertaining themselves safely.

Look at the entertainment that you are offering - is it for a young audience? Think about what younger people are into and there's your answer, although cowboys and Indians were great once perhaps Transformers would appeal more...

#### **Youth Section**

An area outside your responsibility but definitely worth bearing in mind is that the difference between having or not having a youth Section is truly outstanding — Youth Leaders are in short supply.

#### Newsletter

Your DA/Section/Region should have its own internal newsletter published regularly - four times a year minimum which keeps everyone up-to-date with news and information. There's always lots of news to use. Great positive stories can come from

previous and future meets, even if there aren't any pictures present the key selling point particularly if it's an event to come. If you can put a positive spin on a meet, people will be up beat about it before you even get there. The better something sounds the more people want to be part of it. That's how it works when you're promoting something. Try it, it really works.

If you're newsletter's still a little short then why not have a look for news and information The Club's website which once in the public domain can be reused, just credit where credit's due. Some of the specialist camping websites have some great articles, again, credit... You could also use some of the pieces in PRO News and Views as long as they're relevant and why not create a your story area where you could interview a whole manner of people about their roles and what matters to them.

Jokes are always great in a newsletter alongside people stories and pictures. Don't forget a couple of jokes, a photo or two and there you have it all done. I know it isn't easy writing a newsletter, but once you have one in your hand you have an opening opportunity to talk to someone new on the field. "Hello, have you got one of our newsletters?" Start a database of interested members and you will see that if your newsletter is fun, informative and useful, everyone will be waiting with baited breath for the next issue.

Finally, make sure the spell checker is switched on, proof it and then and get someone else to read it before you print it. As long as there is nothing contentious, offensive (to anyone) or slanderous and every story has a positive slant, then you can't really go wrong. It might be a good idea to acquaint yourself with all the rules of The Club - you don't want to receive a letter of censure from the Director General for promoting a Regional Councillor without mentioning any of the others or in fact canvassing when you should not...

#### Website

Most DA/Section/Regions have webmasters however it's worth noting that the most important rule about designing a website is to keep it simple. A minimum number of colours, no flashing items all

over the place, just keep it clean and uncluttered which will enable it to be kept updated - something which must be done continuously. Upload photos of meets and up-to-date details about forthcoming ones. Don't be afraid to take items from your newsletter or *Out and About* entries. Make sure that dates are correct.

There are so many items that can be added to a website to make it more compelling that it can be difficult to know where to start. Keep it simple, use The Club's Brand Book for the best colours to use, phrases, tone of voice and more than half way there.

# **Meeting and Greeting**

First impressions last. Potential new members will always remember a welcoming and chatty first impression of our Club. So whether you're working on a stand, meeting a dealer or just welcoming someone to a meet for the first time, even if you don't feel like it, smile and say hello. It's the art of PR — build relationships by being friendly and the next time that person thinks about our Club they'll remember that first impression and come back for more.

Your newsletter is a perfect tool to give to a person thinking of joining your meets, what about also using a diary of events, The Club magazine or perhaps even a publication. Tools help to help you break the ice. Try also to encourage fellow members to talk to new and potential members, especially at meets. There's nothing worse than a frosty welcome from The Friendly Club.

#### Selling membership

DA's, Sections and Regions are now able to sell membership in their own right. Firstly they must register their intentions with Marketing who will issue a four digit dealer code. Every time a new member is recruited, your DA/Section/Region will receive £4. Once 10 new members in a financial year are recruited, the reward increases to £10 per member. So for the first 9 members you will receive £36 in total. Your 10th member is worth £64 to you and every subsequent member is worth £10.

# Merchandising

Merchandising is another great way to make members. Dealers of outdoor equipment, caravans and motorhomes stock our membership and it's the job of a Merchandiser to keep the dealer happy and fully stocked with packs, information and point of sale goods. These are great contacts and they themselves are often looking for opportunities to get their business known locally so could offer some support to you. Merchandisers are not necessarily PROs. Please see the PRO Handbook for further details.

# **Advertising**

Producing flyers and leaflets provide a great way of selling an event or meet that you are doing. There is nothing to stop you producing these for people you know but if you want these and other forms of advertising to be seen externally you need to produce something eye-catching and compelling.

If you have managed to design something then to get high quality printed look you need to order in bulk, which has a cost implication. Colour laser printers will give better results than ink jet printers but the running costs are high. External adverts have to take into account the audience and may need to point out any restrictions which you as a DA/Section member are well acquainted with.

If you have managed to get your foot in the door with a dealer then think about putting together a poster which could be strategically placed, laminated if possible. If you are advertising a future meet your dealer wants as many people to go to it as possible because the more we camp, the more money the dealer makes. If the dealer recommends your meet for example then that is worth a thousand leaflets. If someone turns up on a field and says "My local dealer told me to come here" then let your dealer know - he'll feel good and recommend even more people.

# Sending entries into

# Camping & Caravanning Magazine

Just had a good meet... do you have some good photos which show off your DA/Section/Region...

then write to the magazine and tell them about it. Ever wonder why there is so little mention of DAs in the magazine, rather than wonder do something about it. Often the magazine may get your picture but if it's of a poor quality, then the likelihood is that it won't appear. Imagine that you didn't know anyone in that photo - you now have no connection with that event so why should anyone else want to look at it? The publication team do get lots of photos so yours needs to be eye catching. Make sure the quality is good and that the story attached is interesting and something that you may want to read — don't forget that this is an influential, national magazine.

A story or a picture should follow the following guidelines: It has to be topical, relevant, unusual, trouble or human. Look in any newspaper and every story or photo will meet at least one of the above criteria. The magazine follows the same guidelines.

# It's all about the spin

Public Relations is a powerful thing when you don't have a budget for lots of marketing, advertising and promotional literature. It's all about using the opportunities that surround you to get your message across.

Time and time again we hear journalists in the media ranting about caravans on the road or saying 'you'd never get me in a tent, they're so uncomfortable...'. As a PRO it's your role to challenge these perceptions and shout about why you love doing what you do.

The Club has commissioned two reports that show that we spend on average £30 per night plus site fees in the area local to where we are camping. This is big money and has a major beneficial effect on the local economies in the UK.

Environmentally camping in all its forms is much cleaner than any long haul jet aircraft or cruise ship and the places in which we camp have a beneficial effect on the local wildlife unlike sprawling masses of concrete hotels. We tour the country with our 'second' homes ensuring that the areas we visit are supported not left empty in low season.

Campers are great - be proud of what you do and if you get a chance to do so in a forum, on a phone

in radio programme, through proactively inviting a journalist to a meet for a bacon butty (vegetarian alternatives available), shout about how great the lifestyle really is. And once you're done shouting, then, make sure the people that may have heard something great about camping but can't remember the name or how to contact a local group - because it sounds like fun - make sure these people can get hold of you. You need to do this through a strong presence which can be achieved through advertisements, press releases etc.

All of this goes into much more detail in the PRO Handbook.

#### Summary

There's a lot of responsibility in your role but if you're proactive and really want to get your DA/Section/ Region heard then you can achieve anything. It's about a Club, our Club, we all want to promote what we do for the future of what we do. Many people remember what it used to be like to camp as part of a DA or a Section or a Region and there's nothing stopping that from happening again. It's not a case of members no longer wanting to camp as part of a group, some in fact have challenged what is happening and, have hit upon the secret of providing what the modern member is looking for. They are not the same members that we had 30 years ago and their needs and expectations have changed. What your DA/Section/Region needs to do is find out what those needs and expectations are and then concentrate on fulfilling those needs.

We wish you well in your role and look forward to hearing from you soon.

The Communications Committee

Thanks go to
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