

Modernising Membership Models



MEMBERSHIP

Membership Recruitment and Retention

This section looks at free or affordable ways to attract and retain new members using creative ways of introducing people to the club and providing flexible payment options.

Work with your regional development team to develop an annual membership growth plan, that may include some of the following suggestions.



Bring a Friend

Joining a tennis club can be a very daunting experience, especially if you don't know anyone at the club. Another challenge that people have to overcome when thinking of joining a club is the perceived 'ability barrier' and the fear that 'I won't be good enough' to play at social events or designated club nights. However, having a friend, acquaintance or colleague at the club makes the transition a little less rocky, especially if they invite you to a dedicated introductory session where there is likely to be other 'new recruits' who are also in the same boat and are experiencing the same concerns about not knowing anyone and not being good enough.

This is a great way to introduce new people into (what could be) an intimidating environment with the existing member ensuring that the first experience is a positive one, that the friend is playing in a suitable playing ability group and to introduce the friend to a number of existing members both on the court and in the clubhouse/bar, whilst comparing notes with other new participants.

It's important to generate a friendly, welcoming environment to attract new members and to keep current members coming back.

Guidance notes:

This is relatively easy to implement.

1. Identify a convenient time or times within the clubs schedule and promote to existing members.
2. We suggest that you target a small/specific ability group to begin with and then promote to other groups as necessary.
3. This could also work with juniors too, and is a good way to recruit new participants and players onto the coaching programme and club membership. This again, would have to be manufactured at the end of the junior coaching group term to recruit for the start of the next term, and also, so that it is not a distraction or interruption to the dedicated coaching groups. (See coaching and coaches)
4. Consider providing both the member and the prospective member with an enticing discount as an incentive (see Incentives)

Buddy Scheme

As is cited within the 'Bring a Friend' section, joining a club can be intimidating and even if someone overcomes the initial challenge of joining a new club, the first few months can be daunting, not knowing anyone to play with, who to contact or which groups to play in.

This is where we believe that when new members join, that they be assigned a Buddy, who is an existing member and is happy to dedicate some time to make the new member settle into the club, be the first point of contact and point them in the right direction.

Guidance notes:

This is very easy to implement.

1. Communicate the Buddy system to your existing members and request an expression of interest from those wishing to be involved.
2. The Buddy scheme would work very well in conjunction with the 'Bring a friend' intervention and if the appointed Buddy isn't the friend that introduced the new member, there is then a guarantee that the new member has contact from more than one person.
3. The Buddy could be responsible for more than one new member, depending on the level of interest from existing members.

*Incentivise
existing members
to help you grow!*



Word of mouth is known to be the best form of advertising, therefore getting existing members to recommend the club to their friends is a simple yet effective way to grow membership. It is also a great way to be introduced to a new environment as you are guaranteed to know at least one person on your first visit.

4. We would suggest having a dedicated period of time (3 Months) with a formal yet friendly introduction and end of Buddy period sign off, to ensure that the new member knows all they need to know and don't have any concerns.
5. If the club runs frequent 'new member attraction' sessions (see Open Access) an identified member could be responsible for attending one attraction session and then become the dedicated Buddy for all members that join from that event.
6. This also works with juniors by either appointing a Buddy within each coaching group for all new participants and/or appointing a number of the more involved, older juniors to act as wider Buddy/role models for all juniors across the club.

Corporate Membership

The days of lucrative financial sponsorships in exchange for little recognition seem to have long gone, however, forging local commercial partnerships with a mutual benefit to both partners would be encouraged. The key is to present the offer to a local business, which is often brokered through a member, as a mutually beneficial agreement which allows the commercial partner to access a valuable database of members to whom they are able to promote their products/services and in turn the club could offer the commercial partner a 'corporate membership' package for their employees.

The number of employees will vary, so there may be a need to tailor a sliding scale membership offer according to the size of the organisation, i.e. 1-10 employees = \$x, 11-20 employees = \$y etc. This cost would be built into the overall partnership package and could be positioned/sold to the partner as an affordable opportunity for them to provide the tennis club membership to their employees as an employee benefit to contribute towards their health and well being – 'a healthy workforce is a productive workforce'.....

This could also be sold onto the employees if the employer doesn't see such a benefit or doesn't have the benefit, but whichever way it is positioned, this is a great way of linking sponsorship and getting new people playing tennis at the club.

Work with local businesses to build your community profile and to attract their workforce to the club as new members allowing the business to promote itself to your members.

Incentives – discounts and benefits

Many clubs spend a considerable amount of time, effort and money each year in an attempt to recruit new members and often with little return for their investment!

The best advocates of your club and subsequent ambassadors are your current members. They also have a ready made network of friends, clients, colleagues and associates that are more than likely not members of your club and as such, may not be aware of the club and what it has to offer.

We acknowledge that people lead busy lives and although people are happy to lend a helping hand to the club from time to time, the offer of an incentive may encourage a more proactive approach?

Offer incentives to entice the children of adult members to play or the parents of junior members to join - the chances are they are probably spending time at the club anyway, so why not offer a discount to twist their arm!



Guidance notes:

1. Current members could be offered an agreed 10% discount off their annual membership fee for every new member they introduce to the club. The discount would be applied the year after the new member is introduced and is a fully paid up member.
2. You could consider limiting or capping the discount that applies to each member, although if you have a proactive member, we don't see the harm in providing the maximum discount. However, if a 10% discount is applied to an annual subscription of \$400, it requires a member to introduce 10 new members to cancel out their membership, whilst raising \$4000 through new subscriptions.
3. If you have an adult membership of 200 and 10% of these members introduce one new member each you will raise an additional \$8000 (based on an annual fee of \$400)
4. The club could consider offering the 10% discount to the existing and the NEW member as an added incentive, which is only available to new members that are introduced through an existing member.
5. Many of the parents of the club's junior members will not be members themselves, so why not offer them a discounted membership or an introductory course of lessons (or refresher lessons if they have played before) to encourage them to get involved in playing at the club. These sessions or playing opportunities could be offered on an adjacent court to the one their children are playing at, allowing them to occupy their time whilst having to be at the club.
6. Alternatively, if a parent is a member of the club and they have one child that is interested in starting to play, the club could offer a discounted membership to the child and/or discounted introductory lessons. This may be worth considering as the majority of family membership packages apply to two parents and dependents, yet this discards one parent and one child/children from gaining any discounted loyalty reward.

Coach Incentives

In the same way that we suggest ways to recognise and reward existing members, the same could be said for the coach/coaches. In fact, the coach should be a frequent face at the club and often the first person people see upon their arrival, and is in a far stronger position to refer new members. Also if the coach offers coaching opportunities to non-members, they are in a very strong position to make the referral.

Guidance notes:

1. Provide the coach with an agreed fee for each new member they introduce to the club.
2. This could apply to both adults and juniors and the fee would be reflected in the proportionate difference of their annual membership fee.

3. The club could offer all new members that are introduced through the coaching programme/ coach, a 10% discount.
4. The club should provide the coach with a new member referral form to enable the club membership secretary to identify the coach referral and account for it accordingly.
5. The coach would invoice the club at the end of the fiscal year when the club would cross reference with the referral forms and the fully paid up members.

NB: There is additional guidance on coaches and coaching within a dedicated section and the coach incentive suggestion above may contradict or conflict with some other suggestions and working models. Please refer to the coaching and coaches section for more information.

The coach can often be the only membership recruitment method that a club has so why not reward them for their valuable contribution to the growth of the club?

Open Access

Most clubs run an annual 'Open Day' type session to attract new members. In our experience, junior open days, meet the coach, come and try sessions can be successful if run well with enthusiasm and vigor, however, we question the success of such a blanket approach for adult member attraction. We also question and challenge the 'annual' element of the 'Open Day' as they are traditionally held at the very start of the tennis season, when people aren't really thinking tennis and the weather hasn't improved enough for tennis to appeal to the fair weather players!

Guidance notes:

1. Identify key dates in the calendar and draft an annual member recruitment plan, which identifies key dates and groups to target specific areas of growth.
2. We suggest that each Open access session is very targeted to a specific group and marketed accordingly: i.e. adult beginners session held on a mid week evening, Hot Shots (under10) taster sessions held on a Saturday afternoon, which doesn't conflict with the ongoing coaching programme on Saturday morning or with other local coaching sessions for other sports.
3. Identify a regular 'non-member drop-in' session for both adults and juniors to give interested parties the flexibility to attend and also to enable them to attend on more than one occasion to reinforce their wish to join.
4. Don't always target the start of the season as a member attraction opportunity and be sure to promote the flexibility of paying the proportionate annual membership fee, depending on when they join.
5. Ensure you maximise the pre-holiday periods to attract new juniors to the holiday coaching groups (in partnership with the coach) and also ensure you capitalise on times when tennis is topical such as prior to and during the NZ Festival of Tennis.

Fair Play

A large proportion of society now controls their increased outgoings through manageable payment plans, which are deducted by either direct debits or standing orders. We believe that offering flexible payment options for annual fees would attract more members and would offset the slight increase in administration time to set up the relevant banking mandates.

Guidance notes:

1. Offer a monthly or quarterly payment plan option for all members. If the club incurs charges in providing such financial services, they should of course be passed onto the member, however these could be hidden by offering all members that chose to pay their annual fees upfront and in full, with the relevant discount.
2. Provide the members with the facility to pay their fees electronically via electronic bank transfer or credit/debit card.
3. If the electronic platforms are not possible, consider providing the members with the option of paying in agreed manual installments. Some clubs may feel the need to charge an admin fee when introducing this option.

Try Before You Buy

Many people wishing to play tennis more frequently often don't join a tennis club due to the uncertainty of how often they would play and the subsequent proportionate cost per visit if they don't play enough. This can be overcome by offering a relatively risk free three month introduction to prospective members.

Guidance notes:

1. Offer prospective members an introductory three-month offer. An example would be to offer 3 months at \$80.00 with an additional 10% discount should they wish to become a full member thereafter.
2. We would encourage the introductory period to be extended for people who are unconvinced after 3 months with the view of hooking them over a longer period of time.

Something For Everyone

Most clubs offer a variety of membership options to cater for the varying needs of its members. We have taken the time to list below some of the more popular options as a reference guide which may encourage you to introduce an additional category, should you feel it necessary:

Traditional membership categories include:

Junior, Student, senior, couple, family, mid week (off peak) and social.

Less common variations include:

Junior + Saturday morning coaching (see coaching and financial

There are few things in life that we buy without trying them first, so why do we consider a tennis club membership to be any different? Give people a trial which softens the financial blow and eases them into the club!

sections), Junior Plus – with senior playing rights

You may also wish to introduce a rolling membership, allowing people to become members for 12 months from the day they join without having a fixed point in the calendar when all memberships expire.

Know What Your Members Want

The success of any business is based on knowing your customers and what they need, and running a tennis club should be no different. Customer service is largely focused on delivering your services to the needs of the customer and unless you are aware of what your customer's opinion is, it is very difficult to improve their experience or respond to a need. It is occasionally the case that clubs will introduce something new at the club as the committee 'thought' that it was what the members may like rather than basing the decision on fact.

This is easily rectified and with multiple free online survey platforms available now, there is no excuse for not conducting frequent online members surveys, to truly understand what your members think of the club and what it offers. This could be done annually and you could incentivise members to complete the survey by placing all respondents into a prize draw for a free annual membership or free coaching session etc.

Lapsed Members:

It is often the case that clubs don't follow up with lapsed members to understand why they have left the club and to learn from their mistakes in an attempt to improve retention rates in future years etc. We acknowledge that it is not always down to the fault of the clubs that people leave, in fact, it appears that a number of people that surrender their tennis club membership do so as they have sustained an injury or simply feel that they are no longer able to play tennis due to the physically demanding nature of the sport.

That said, there are valid reasons for people leaving and providing recently lapsed members with an opportunity to tell you why they left could be invaluable. The club then has the ability to address any issues and in turn offering the lapsed member with an incentive to return to the club whilst demonstrating that the club has responded to the needs of its members.

Managing Growth

Many clubs indicated during our consultation period that they were nervous about attracting more members/participants, as they didn't know how they would manage the growth and cope with the demands and subsequent administration. We appreciate that this can be a daunting prospect, especially for a committee that may already be overstretched and working at capacity.

If the club embarks on a modest campaign to grow its membership, the subsequent income could be used to employ a part-time administrator or club manager to manage the additional workload, who may also be able alleviate some of the administration burden on the committee. The following modest growth model demonstrates the income to offset the cost of appointing an administrator:

20 x new adult members @ \$250 = \$5,000.00

20 x new junior members @ \$150 = \$3,000.00

10 x casual players @ \$10 each per week x 40 weeks = \$4,000.00 Total additional income = \$12,000.00

This new revenue stream would comfortably cover the cost of a part time administrator or manager and should the workload grow due to a greater swell in new members, then you simply increase the amount of time required by the administrator from the additional income. The only challenge we foresee is the initial period whilst the campaign is gaining speed when the new members may join over a period of time, thus not enabling you to invest in an administrator until later in the process, unless the clubs realises the potential and decides to speculate to accumulate.

Welcome Pack - Club Handbook

Although most clubs now have a website presence, new members are often unsure of playing schedules, fixtures, social events or who to contact to ask such questions. New members would find a document that outlines the clubs key contacts, court booking procedures, facility access, use of floodlights, visitor access, terms of use and any restrictions very useful, however, this could be an electronic document that is emailed to the new member as part of their 'welcome pack' thus saving costs of printing. This document/information could also sit on the website for members to access at their convenience and possibly sit alongside some useful 'frequently asked questions' which may alleviate a phone call or email as 50% of the new member questions could be answered through this section of the website.

More information on this can also be found in the 'Marketing and Communication'

Assistance:

For any assistance or enquiries on implementing any of the above suggestions please contact your regional development manager.