



Membership Retention and Growth

Your Club Needs Both

*Compliments of Heath Suddleson, DTM
International Director 2009-2011*

Introduction

This document contains thoughts, ideas, and tactics for retaining the members you have and for bringing new members into your club. Toastmasters from all over the world have contributed to this project. It is not intended to be an absolute list of ways to build membership, but it is intended to give you specific ideas on how to advertise your club, while still allowing you to use your own imagination and creativity. Rather than attempt to list over 100 ways to build membership, this list is designed to give you just the top 25 ways to advertise a corporate or community club. If your club uses a combination of the growth methods and a combination of the retention methods, you will be able to maintain a substantial and active membership. Most clubs that are at 12 members or lower ended up that way because they had no on-going membership building campaign. Every club will lose members over the course of time and you need to have a constant supply of fresh faces, ideas, and talent. Use this list by asking each club member to select one or two things that they will be responsible for managing. This way each person does a little and collectively your club achieves a lot.



The Open House

Whether your club is below 12 members or over 20, you may want to plan an Open House every 6 months at a minimum. An Open House is simply a meeting that occurs in place of your regularly scheduled club meeting. You plan a shortened agenda with only one speech, three table topics questions, and one evaluation. You should still have a timer, grammarian, and uh counter. The Toastmaster of the Day should be your best sales person. By having a short agenda, you have allowed yourself time to fully explain each meeting role as well as time to talk about the benefits of Toastmasters.

The reason that an Open House is ideal is because you have one meeting that you can advertise as an event. It's often much easier to encourage someone to come to a single and special event as opposed to inviting them to show up to any one of your meetings. This also allows you to give special attention to the guests all at one time.

You should select a date at least one month in advance to allow proper time to advertise the Open House. Now that you have selected a date, it's time to advertise. Prepare a flyer specific to your event and include the date, time, and location of your meeting. We will discuss in the following sections how best to advertise your Open House. You will find sections on membership growth and retention for both corporate clubs and community clubs. You can pick and choose tactics listed for advertising your club or you can use these suggestions to create your own tactics.

Many of the tactics suggested in this handout recommend the use of brochures from TI. They are free if you order 20 copies or less, but you must pay for shipping. Next time you place an order at the TI on line store, be sure to add these to your order. Even if you order just these brochures, shipping should be less that \$2.00.

Catalog Item No. 99

Catalog Item No. 101

Don't forget to have a sign in sheet to get the contact information of all of your guests. You will need to follow up with each one to be sure they join. Be sure to have a Guest Packet for each guest that comes to your meeting. Even if they come to a meeting other than an Open House, you should have a packet of information for them to take. Include in the packet, information on Toastmasters, information on your club, a copy of Toastmasters Magazine, a membership application, and the brochures listed above. It's best to keep these with the other club properties, such as your banner and timing cards.



Membership Retention

Retaining members in any type of club works on the basic principle that if your members are happy they will not be eager to leave. The best ways to keep your members happy and engaged is to talk to them about their goals and needs, then work to fulfill them.

- ✦ Make sure that your club programming is scheduled in advance and distributed to each member regularly. Your club should have no less than the next 4 meetings scheduled for each role. Remember that people need time to prepare for their roles and finding out only a week or two before they are supposed to fill a role is not going to promote a happy membership. Think about it in these terms, “Would you live paycheck to paycheck if you had the choice?” If at the conclusion of one meeting your club is trying to fill all of the roles for the next meeting, then you are living paycheck to paycheck. For each meeting in advance that you schedule all of the roles, it is like putting money in the bank. If you are having trouble finding volunteers, don't be afraid to have your VP Education assign the roles. More often than not, members would rather be assigned roles a month or two in advance, than volunteer at the last minute.
- ✦ Call members to confirm that they will fill the role assigned. This can be delegated to the Toastmaster of the Day, but it must be done. People often need reminders and encouragement and a personal phone call is the best way to do that. This is also helpful when a member has a conflict and can't fill an assigned role. If you have called in advance, you will be able to make alternate arrangements for the role.
- ✦ Call members who have missed two or more meetings. Sometime just a phone call to tell the person that they are missed will bring them back to the meetings and keep them engaged. A member who stops attending meetings and isn't contacted will feel that they are not valued by your club.
- ✦ Acknowledge accomplishments. Don't let the completion of an educational goal pass your club by. If you are not publicizing each educational milestone then you are missing an opportunity to make your members feel appreciated and valued.
- ✦ Acknowledge Birthdays. This can be done at the meeting closest to the member's birthday or you can acknowledge all birthdays for the month at the first meeting of the month. Either way is a great opportunity to let your members know that they are appreciated.
- ✦ Have a mentor/mentee program. Ask an experienced member to coach a new member and teach them the ropes. This is a great way to keep more experienced members involved and help newer members learn the program better.



- 🔑 Have a themed or alternate program meeting. Whether you do all Table Topics for one meeting, have a backwards meeting, or some special theme, it is a nice change of pace that keeps things fun and interesting.
- 🔑 Conduct presentations from the Better Speaker Series or Successful Club Series modules. Many people join Toastmasters for the opportunity to learn as well as the opportunity to practice. By giving presentations from these modules, you are creating the opportunity to learn and improve.
- 🔑 Evaluate to Motivate. This seems so basic, but it is the most critical component of the meeting. What is the benefit of giving a presentation in Toastmasters if you don't get a good evaluation. Be sure to present the evaluation in a positive and supportive manner, and above all, be sure to give no less than two points for improvement. An evaluation with no points for improvement is a disservice to the speaker and the audience alike.
- 🔑 Have fun. Let's face it, people who have fun are more likely to continue. If your meetings are well scheduled, fulfilling, and fun, then you will have most of your members showing up for every meeting. Even if they aren't assigned a role, they will come for the fun.





Membership Growth

Corporate/Government Clubs

1. Invite a Friend – The most effective mode of advertisement is the warm contact invitation. Have each of your members make a list of 15 people in the building or area who are not members of Toastmasters. Each member of your club must contact them by phone or in person. E-mail may not be used for the initial contact, but may be used for reminders. Think about the possibilities. If you have 10 members and they each bring 3 guests. That's 30 guests at one meeting. If only half of them join then you have 15 new members from a single meeting!
2. Get Management Support – Corporate Management can be your best ally in encouraging people to join your club. Managers can promote the club at staff meetings, they can encourage individual members to join to work on specific needs, and they can praise Toastmasters accomplishments in staff meetings and in performance reviews. All of these are positive ways that management can show support without any cost to the company.
3. Company E-mail Bulletins – Get permission from your company to use the company wide e-mail to advertise your club meetings. Include in each bulletin the next two upcoming meetings. Keep the bulletins to once per month or less to avoid wearing out your welcome.
4. Corporate Visit – Visit the management at a company near you that does not have a Toastmasters Club and get their support just like you got your own management on board.
5. Coffee and Doughnuts – Have some of your club members stand in the kitchen or break room area with plenty of Toastmasters brochures and club flyers as well as some coffee and doughnuts. Each person who takes a doughnut is expected to take a brochure and flyer as well. Have them sign a prospect sheet with their name and contact phone number. It helps to hold this activity the day before or even the same day as your club meeting.
6. Give Away - Have a simple gift of some type and hold a drawing among all the guests at your Open House. The winner of the drawing wins the prize. Be sure to let them know that they must be present to win. Some clubs have prepared a gift basket to use for this prize.
7. Traffic Stop – Be where the traffic is in your office. Set up a table outside of the cafeteria or in the main lobby of your building and hand out flyers and brochures. Have members there to speak about the club and the benefits of Toastmasters. Be sure to have people sign the prospect sheet with their name and contact information.
8. Marketing Cards – Hand out cards with your club contact information when you meet someone and they are interested in Toastmasters. You can even order pre-made cards from Toastmasters International.



9. Post Flyers – Although not the best form of advertisement, they should still be used as reminders and name recognition. Post them in every place possible. Some clubs have even placed flyers in the restroom stalls.
10. Speechcraft – Offer a Speechcraft session at your office. Plan to do this in one hour sessions over 8 weeks at a time that works with your company hours. Lunch may work well. Because you are allowed to charge for Speechcraft, you can set a fee to your company that includes the course materials, lunch each week, and six months dues in your club. After your Speechcraft and the first 6 months of membership, many of the participants will renew their membership. You can ask your company management to help you recruit Speechcraft participants.
11. Conduct a Success in Communication or Success in Leadership Series – Offer this option and run it the same way you would a Speechcraft as detailed above. Depending on the module selected, the course would take 2 – 4 One hour sessions.
12. Appreciation Day – Invite someone in management to come be honored by your club. If it is someone who is not readily approachable by the majority of your staff, this could be a good draw of guests.
13. Website – Whether you are a corporate or community club, you should have a website. Sites such as www.freetoasthost.org can help you get started.
14. Local Newspapers – Most local newspapers have a community calendar. Even though you are not a community club, that does not mean that you can't contact your paper and ask to be listed in the calendar. You can even set up a repeating advertisement schedule so that you don't have to submit each time you have a meeting.
15. Alumni Meeting – Plan a meeting in which you invite people who are no longer members to come for a visit. This may give you the opportunity to bring some of them back. If you have people coming to visit who no longer work at your location, some of their old friends /co-workers may come to your meeting just to see the Alumni.
16. Ask Human Resources to include a flyer about the club in the new employee orientation packet or even with payroll checks.
17. Post meeting announcements on websites such as craigslist.org or backpage.com under the community sections.
18. Ask Human Resources for an appointment to give a 20 minute presentation on the benefits of Toastmasters and how it can help the company's training efforts.
19. Continuing Education - Inquire about the possibility of club members earning continuing education credit.



20. Round Up Guests on your way to the meeting - As you are going to your meeting, stop by the desk of those you have been inviting to come to a meeting. Escort them to the meeting and make sure they are introduced to the club members if they don't know each other already.
21. Display Your Club Banner - Put up your banner or a sign saying where you meet in the hallway outside of your meeting space. This is a great attention getter and a nice reminder to people walking by that they have the benefit of a Toastmasters Club in their building.
22. Toastmasters Magazine – Place your old copies of The Toastmaster magazine in waiting rooms and receptions areas at your office and other offices near your meeting location. Cover the mailing label with a new label that gives all of your club contact information.
23. Company Mailroom – If your company has a location where each employee can collect their mail, consider putting your club newsletter or a flyer into each mail slot.
24. Display Your TM Stuff – Trophies from speech contests, certificates for educational accomplishments, and other awards make great conversation if displayed at your desk. You can also get TM mouse pads, etc.
25. Host a Pizza Party or Happy Hour - This is a great way to get people to come visit you. Once they are there you can talk about the benefits of Toastmasters and invite them to an Open House.





Community Clubs

1. Invite a Friend – The most effective mode of advertisement is the warm contact invitation. Have each of your members make a list of 15 people in the community or area who are not members of Toastmasters. Each member of your club must contact them by phone or in person. E-mail may not be used for the initial contact, but may be used for reminders. Think about the possibilities. If you have 10 members and they each bring 3 guests. That's 30 guests at one meeting. If only half of them join then you have 15 new members from a single meeting!
2. The Library – Print cards with your club information and put a card in each book in the library that is on the subject of communication or public speaking.
3. Local Newspapers – Most local newspapers have a community calendar. Contact your paper and ask to be listed in the calendar. You can even set up a repeating advertisement schedule so that you don't have to submit each time you have a meeting.
4. Have a website – Believe it or not, many leads will come from having a club website. Set one up and keep it updated. Be sure to include a list of club officers and some fun facts about the club.
5. Invite a Local Politician – Think of an award that you can give to a local politician and invite them to come receive it. Once they have accepted, you can advertise the event in newspapers and invite the community to come see him or her receive the award.
6. Marketing Cards – Hand out cards with your club contact information when you meet someone and they are interested in Toastmasters. You can even order pre-made cards from Toastmasters International
7. Post Flyers – Although not the best form of advertisement, they should still be used as reminders and name recognition. Post them in every place possible. Some clubs have even placed flyers in the restroom stalls.
8. Speechcraft – Offer a Speechcraft session at your office. Plan to do this over 8 weeks at a time that works with your club meeting schedule. Because you are allowed to charge for Speechcraft, you can set a fee to your company that includes the course materials and six months dues in your club. After your speechcraft and the first 6 months of membership, many of the participants will renew their membership. You can advertise for Speechcraft participants using most of the methods included here.
9. Conduct a Success in Communication or Success in Leadership Series – Offer this option and run it the same way you would a Speechcraft as detailed above. Depending on the module selected, the course would take 2 – 4 days.



10. Alumni Meeting – Plan a meeting in which you invite people who are no longer members to come for a visit. This may give you the opportunity to bring some of them back. If you have people coming to visit, some of their old friends may come to your meeting just to see the Alumni.
11. Toastmasters Magazine – Place your old copies of The Toastmaster magazine in waiting rooms at doctor's offices and hair care salons. Cover the mailing label with a new label that gives all of your club contact information.
12. Conduct a session or seminar in some topic that you feel has public interest, such as a town hall meeting or a workshop on interviewing skills. Advertise it using the other methods in this listing.
13. Community Access Television - Invite a local cable station to tape and air a regular club meeting. You can also make an appearance on a local show and talk about the benefits of Toastmasters.
14. Booth at Fair or Town Day Celebrations – Set up a booth at a fair or special town holiday and have plenty of literature on hand. Talk to people about the benefits of Toastmasters.
15. Radio PSA – Send a Public Service Announcement (PSA) to local radio stations. They are required to air PSAs, but will often do so at odd hours so don't expect too much.
16. Radio Talk Show – See if you can arrange to be interviewed on a local radio talk show. If possible, you can even answer questions from callers to the show.
17. Harness Campus Media - Reach university or college students and staff by tapping into their frosh kits, campus newspapers or radio stations. Make a presentation to faculty and give them the tools to promote your club in class.
18. Get Listed on Websites - Many communities have excellent websites and will gladly list information about your Toastmasters club. Craigslist has become an excellent place to post ads about your meetings. Also check Chambers of Commerce and other civic organizations.
19. Sandwich board – Set up a sign streetside on meeting nights. Make your own, or order metal signs and large decals from the Toastmasters catalog.
20. Shopping Center - Get permission to set up a Toastmasters table at your local mall or shopping center. Why not in a high traffic area like right outside the grocery store.
21. Host a Pizza Party or Happy Hour – Use a social event as a way to meet people and talk about the benefits of Toastmasters. Once they are there, you can invite them to an Open House.



22. Corporate Visit - Visit with nearby corporations or offices and let them know you are in the area. They may not be large enough to support their own corporate club, but may send their staff to your club. Pay attention to schools in the area and ask the administration if you can advertise to the faculty. These people are not free during lunch time meetings but might be interested in evening or weekend clubs.
23. Display Your TM Stuff – Trophies from speech contests, certificates for educational accomplishments, and other awards make great conversation if displayed at your desk. You can also get TM mouse pads, etc.
24. Display Your Club Banner - Put up your banner or a sign saying where you meet in the hallway outside of your meeting space. This is a great attention getter and a nice reminder to people walking by that they have the benefit of a Toastmasters Club in their building. If you meet in a library or church, they may be able to display your banner full time.
25. Advertise in Church Bulletins – Even if you are not meeting in a church, you can probably advertise in the bulletins of nearby churches, synagogues, mosques, and other places of worship.



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