

**The Sky's the Limit!**  
**Great Ideas for Great Clubs**

# **Perks & Pride**

## **Engaging Your Membership**



# **ARABIAN HORSE ASSOCIATION**

## **VISION STATEMENT**

**To incite a passion to own and enjoy the Arabian horse by bringing a rich, life-long experience to people through involvement with Arabians, Half-Arabians and Anglo-Arabians.**

## **MISSION STATEMENT**

**To grow the breed by:**

- providing services, industry involvement and market development;**
- encouraging people to fully experience and enjoy Arabian, Half-Arabian and Anglo-Arabian horses for recreation, sport and companionship; and**
- maintaining accurate and reliable Arabian horse registration records.**

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## **It's the age-old question...**

Every year at the AHA Convention you can hear a common topic of discussion among the delegates. It is a theme that affects local AHA clubs from Northern California to South Carolina, from Victoria to Texas. It is a problem common to large clubs and small, financially sound clubs and those that are a little cash-strapped. And that question is... "How do we get more members of our club to show up for meetings and participate in our events?" You know the drill, it seems to be the same six people that hold the club together, and that can get a little bit tiring. The key to solving this dilemma is the membership itself. How can you get your club membership energized, excited and passionate about belonging to the club? How can you create an atmosphere of purpose and success that will attract new members with fresh ideas and perspectives? How can you tap into the knowledge and experience of past members of your club? It is the hope of the AHA Market Development & Promotion Committee that you will find a few ideas, and maybe a little inspiration, to answer these questions in the following pages.

## **The Never-Ending Search for Members**

Times, they are a changin'. That is the first thing to remember when you ponder how to grow and energize your membership. What used to work 20, 10 or even 5 years ago is just not the case today. There was a time in AHA where clubs could pretty much let new members seek them out. The industry was booming, and plenty of new people were coming in. A club didn't need to think too much about a plan to find new members, let alone retain them. But that is no longer the case.

There are so many things out there vying for our time, energy and dollars that it is important for each club to have a clear idea of what it is they can provide a member, and broadcast it loudly again and again. It is more important than ever for a club to be relevant and to provide an experience that members care about.

Lets assume that you have revisited or perhaps newly-crafted your club's Vision Statement (as described in 'The Sky's the Limit') and have a clear understanding of what your club is about and what it hopes to accomplish, in general, as a club. Let us also assume that your club has performed a SWOT Analysis (also explained in 'The Sky's the Limit')

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and have a pretty good idea of your clubs' strengths and weaknesses. Armed with this clarity of purpose you are now ready to sell it to the world and attract people that are excited about the prospect of being a part of something great.

## Start Close to Home

If someone is excited and proud about something, they talk about it, they want to share it. So, your best source of new members is through your current membership. The key is to be sure your organization is one that makes them want to introduce their friends and family to it. Are your club meetings social, educational and fun? Here are a few ideas to help keep your current members engaged and happy:



Keep your current members engaged and happy!

1. Be friendly, professional, and organized!
2. Communicate! Information is power! Empower your members!
3. Plan interesting and informative programs.
4. Stay on schedule. Time is valuable; respect member's time.
5. Plan short meetings; excellent speakers.
6. Send out monthly newsletters, postcards, or e-mail to contact members.
7. Provide an informative, upbeat newsletter.
8. Delegate! Develop a communication tree (telephone, e-mail or fax).
9. Send positive, upbeat membership requests, followed by a friendly telephone call.
10. Acknowledge renewed members in newsletters and at meetings.
11. Host drawings (with door prizes) each month from names of renewed members.
12. Recognize members who reach milestone membership anniversaries.
13. Send a survey by e-mail of important questions and issues as they arise.
14. Educate members on the benefits of attending Regional meetings and Convention.
15. Educate members on how to become a delegate or alternate for Convention.
16. Ensure that each member is involved at some level. Involved members renew!

**Friends and family of current members who are engaged and excited about the club are your number one source for new members.**

When you have members that look forward to meetings and being involved, they will invite their friends and family to come to a meeting to see what they are missing. It is also time to reach out to your community to seek out new members. Here are a few ideas to make that initial contact:

- 1. Place ads in local equine newspapers and community association newsletters.**
- 2. Have your club join the local Chamber of Commerce. Non-profit groups are usually invited to join at a very low rate, and you can take advantage of the promotion that your Chamber will provide to you. Generally, this also allows you to display club information in the Chamber office, and have information included in any information packets that are mailed out.**
- 3. You can also ask your local realtor to provide your club information in their “New Neighbor” packets.**
- 4. Consider developing a club flag for meetings, parades, shows and other events.**
- 5. Invite one new guest, and one former member to EVERY regular/special meeting!**
- 6. Contact local radio stations and TV; ask permission to air a free PSA with information about the next meeting or special event.**
- 7. Develop a news release. Send meeting information with time and location to local city or county newspapers.**
- 8. Provide and use club logo stationery for correspondence.**
- 9. Develop a web page where prospective members can secure information about the club.**
- 10. One important member opportunity is past members. Regardless of the reason that they are no longer a member, there was a time when they wanted to be a one. Try to keep these members connected to the club by inviting them to meetings and events from time to time. Keep them aware of all of the fun they are missing!**
- 11. Contact AHA for a list of current members in your area who are not affiliated with a club. Its surprising how many are out there!**



## Not a Horse in Sight

It might be time to broaden your membership horizons and seek members in unconventional locations. There are a whole lot of Arabian horse lovers out there that don't even know that they are! Think how exciting it would be as a club to introduce someone totally new to the horse world to the Arabian horse. Their enthusiasm would likely energize others in the club.

Is your club non-horse person friendly? Do you welcome a guest who hasn't a clue who Khemosabi was and make it so they want to learn more? Do you provide opportunities for this new Arabian enthusiast to learn more and get hooked? This could be the most exhilarating part of member recruitment. And the best part is you have an almost infinite supply of potential members. But, we can help the odds a little bit by going with demographics and locating the most likely new Arabian Enthusiast. Research has shown us that there are several areas that we can concentrate on, and two of these are Children, and Women over 40. So now you need to put your thinking caps on and figure out where you can find these people.

## The Kid Factor

We know that if a child is exposed to horses in a positive way, it makes a lasting impression on them. So if we can expose them to an Arabian, chances are that at some point in their life (it might not be until later, as in the Women over 40 demographic) they will be drawn back to the Arabian. So, where can we find them? Here are a few ideas:

1. If your club has an active Youth group, post meeting information at the local library, ball fields and even at school (if they allow it). Be sure and stress that they do not need to own a horse to come to a meeting!
2. Hold a TAIL Program at your next event!
3. Provide your local 4-H leader with membership forms for your club.
4. Arrange a visit to a local school and bring along an Arabian for show-and-tell.



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An active youth group is a vital part of a vibrant club.

5. Make up special membership forms just for Youth members that emphasize the fact that you do not need to own a horse to join, and as a member you can receive the Modern Arabian Horse magazine, an official membership card and a decal!
6. Set up a booth at a kid-oriented trade show (and, if you bring a horse, you are guaranteed to be the most popular spot!) You can find trade shows in your area at the Tradeshow News Network ([www.tsnn.com](http://www.tsnn.com)). Be sure and have a list of places that children can take riding lessons on Arabians- that is sure to be your most-asked question.
7. Think like today's youth- they use social internet sites like MySpace and Facebook to communicate.
8. Have each Youth member bring at least one friend to a meeting during the year.
9. Offer prizes to the Youth member that brings the most guests during the year.
10. Ask members that have suitable facilities to invite youth groups such as Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, Campfire and Homeschool groups to visit. Have those Youth membership forms available, and a list of facilities that offer riding lessons on Arabians.
11. Your club can consider offering Youth membership scholarships for kids that otherwise may not be able to afford to join.

## Girls Just Want to Have Fun

A powerful group where you could potentially find your next member is the Women over 40 demographic. In general, this group is looking for a fulfilling way to spend their time and expendable income. Many of these women have had a previous horse life and if the opportunity presented itself, they would enthusiastically jump back in. Have information about your club available in local hair salons, gyms, grocery stores, etc., anywhere you might find potential members. Consider having a presence at a women's trade show. There are beauty, family, outdoor living, wellness and recreation trade shows, among many others that might fit the bill. You can check [www.tsnn.com](http://www.tsnn.com) to find out what shows are offered in your area.



## Old School, but Effective

Holding a membership drive is one way of finding new members, but to make it work, the club should set a goal and decide on a time frame. Create a strategic plan to target people and groups most likely to become new members: family, friends and acquaintances of current members. A time frame will help focus the campaign within a manageable period. The outreach strategy will help insure the person-to-person contact that is essential to drawing people in. A friendly competition between club members and a prize incentive will help to make the drive fun. Post regular updates on the club web page or via e-mail to heighten the competition and give members immediate feedback to how their efforts are paying off. Be sure and provide support and accountability to keep as many members as possible participating in the membership drive. At the end of the drive, celebrate the clubs success, acknowledge the efforts of members and welcome your new members!

## Be Our Guest

First impressions ALWAYS count. It's important that a potential member's first impression of your club is a good one.

1. Create a culture of bringing guests to club meetings. Ask every member to bring one guest to one meeting during the year.
2. Offer prizes to the member that brings the most guests during the year.
3. Place a guest book at every regular meeting and special function, asking guests to sign in with their name and address. Then, follow up with a "Thank you for attending" letter and an invitation to join.
4. Give each guest a 'Guest Guide', maybe a tri-fold brochure, with a brief history and purpose of the club, meeting and event dates and contact information.
5. Provide name tags.
6. Conduct a round of introductions at the beginning of the meeting.
7. Visit with the guest before and after the meeting.
8. Be sure and invite the guest to come to another meeting, but don't be pushy.

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Make guests to your club meetings feel like they are important, because they are!

**Take the time to make your guests feel welcome, and they'll be back!**

## **Now Make Them Feel Welcome**

There is a crucial time after a new member joins. They will be wondering if this club thing is going to be for them. They are going to wonder if the cost of membership was money well-spent. They are going to wonder how welcome they will be made to feel. This is the time to be sure that they are immediately made to feel a part of the club.

Ask a club member to be the 'welcome wagon' for a new member. This mentor can answer questions the new member might have and keep in contact with them to remind them about upcoming meetings, events, etc. Be as open and inclusive as you can. Give the member every opportunity to become involved with club projects, but don't overwhelm them by immediately asking them to run for office. Start gently, maybe working a gate at a show for a FEW (not 12!) hours.

## **You've Got 'Em, How Do You Keep Them?**

Providing value to a member can be a little tricky, because the definition of value is going to vary from person to person. In general, if your club is providing educational, social and fun activities, that will resonate with the majority of your membership. You can't be all things to all members, and if you try to you will dilute your mission statement and the purpose of your club and end up providing little value to many members. If you have a strong mission statement, are very clear about the purpose of your club and concentrate your energy on the educational, social and fun aspects of your club, you will attract the very type of member that will make your club great.



1. Make your meetings interesting. And think about your non-horse owning members, too.
2. Consider the location of your meeting. Is it held somewhere that people would look forward to visiting socially? Is it easy to find? Is it suitable for the number of people you hope to accommodate?
3. Are your meetings productive and professionally run? Don't make members feel like you are wasting their time. A printed agenda and

- sticking to the schedule will be very appreciated.
4. **Recognize members for their contributions to the club.** Everyone needs a pat on the back now and then, and a little praise will go a long way to helping members feel appreciated.
  5. **Be accessible.** You won't attract or keep members if information about the club is not easily accessible. The two most likely methods of delivering information are newsletters and a website.

## Communication is Key

In today's world most people will jump online to find further information on something they are interested in. It's important then that your club has a clear and up to date website for them to view. This website should contain the answers to the questions they are most likely to ask. At a minimum it should provide information on:

**What your club is about - What is your mission statement? What future goals are you aiming for? What past achievements are you proud of?**

**Where your club is located - What area do you service?**

**Your club's membership requirements - Are there any restrictions on who can join? What is expected of a member? Are there attendance requirements? What does it cost to be a member?**

**Club project details - What projects are coming up on your club's calendar? What is involved in these projects?**

**Club meeting details - When and where does your club meet? How long do meetings run for? What can a visitor expect at a club meeting?**

**Club contact details - Who should a potential member contact to attend a meeting or get involved in a project?**

**A regular newsletter also enhances your club's accessibility. As well as being mailed or e-mailed out to all current members, copies can be left in relevant places as advertising for your club. Newsletters can also be added to your club's website to provide visitors with an idea on what**



The first place people go when they want information is to the internet. Make sure your club has a compelling web presence where they can get their questions answered.

**Your club website and newsletter should provide the answers to questions potential members are most likely to ask.**

activities your club has been up to recently. Potential visitors can be sent a copy of the latest newsletter when they make contact to attend a meeting. Copies can also be kept on hand to pass out to guests at meetings and projects.

As with the website, each issue of your club's newsletter should provide the answers to the questions potential members are most likely to ask. In most cases this information should not take up too much space in your newsletter. It can also refer readers to your website should they require more details.

Take advantage of free mass e-mail sites (like mailchimp.com) that let you upload your e-mail list and create professional emailed updates and newsletters. People can subscribe to your list via a link on your website and your list will automatically be updated. This same service can link to social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter. In a plugged-in world, this is how many of your current and new members, especially the younger ones, communicate and stay current. Don't disregard the importance of having a presence in social cyber-space.

## **Cyber Savvy**



We are living in a wired society, that there is no denying. And its just not young people text-messaging away, cyber savviness knows no age limit. If your club wants to connect with the most potential new members, it is going to have to jump on the internet train.

Social networking sites can be a very effective way to get information not only to your current members, but others as well. Learning your way around these sites can be intimidating, but it is not rocket science. Like anything else new, it just takes a little time to get used to it. There are many blogs and websites that explain how to use social networking sites to your best advantage. Hurry, the train is leaving the station!

## The Bottom Line

Its not easy to keep a club growing and solvent. It would be nice if enthusiastic new members were signing up to join constantly, but that is seldom the case. The truth is, you belong to your AHA club because it means something to you. It is very personal. Your love for the Arabian horse is what lead you here in the first place. The ideas listed on the preceding pages are meaningless without the passion and commitment to make something happen. The AHA Market Development & Promotion Committee hope we have inspired you even a little bit to go out there and find those Arabian horse lovers. They're waiting for you to show them this magnificent animal that is bound to make their world a better one.



**"Flaming enthusiasm, backed by horse sense and persistence, is the quality that most frequently makes for success"**

**- Dale Carnegie**

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## NOTES