

Let the good times roll...

A bias for bowling in the sun

Club Marketing Guide

A Basic Guide to Help you Market and Promote Your Lawn Bowls Club in the USA

Proven techniques from successful and growing clubs
- because membership growth solves all other problems.

US ♥ Lawn Bowls

Developed by the volunteer marketing committee
of the US Lawn Bowls Association



Lawn Bowls Club Marketing Guide

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1.0 Action Plan - Methodology

All suggestions and plans in this marketing book have been proven at other lawn bowls clubs in the USA, so you can try any and all of these techniques with some level of confidence they will work. But it takes team work!

Step one:

Create a small marketing team in your club. Ideally some of the members are on the current board and at least some have a sales or marketing background (or instincts), though neither of these are firm requirements.

The head of this team should read this complete manual, then create an initial list of possible suggestions that could be implemented at your club. At the first marketing meeting, gather all the members and let them see which ideas they can individually pick up and run with. Yes, multiple ideas all running to start at the same time, because in reality they will all take different times. Some you may only be able to plan initially (like a proper open house), whereas others you can address and complete in a short time frame (e.g. gate flyers).

Remind everyone on the team that your target next member is outside the fence... and maybe even down the street or across town.

Step two:

Just do it. The most important rule of marketing is **Do Something**.

Step three:

Spread the word internally in the club and encourage them all to play "heads up" when it comes to recruiting new members. Be prepared for push back and old-timers who don't want to play with beginners. Don't worry. They will come around eventually when they see hot shot younger players catching up fast - even pushing them to improve their game. Similarly on the social fronts. Don't leave it all to the coach. Anyone who visits also needs a warm friendly welcome around the green and clubhouse. New members bring fresh energy, life and party favors, as well as money and volunteer hours.

If you are going to be putting up your fees anyway, do so before starting a big promotion campaign so expectations are set right for newcomers from the get go. Average annual membership fees (including division and USLBA parts) are now over \$110 per year across the country. This is still ridiculously cheap. If you are much below this, people will probably not appreciate the value you are offering them.

2.0 Basic Checklist

Items on this basic list are considered as marketing cornerstones. Not very glamorous perhaps, but basic ingredients for a good marketing recipe. You may be taking some of these ideas for granted - or they have fallen into misuse because of course you know all this if you bowl regularly.

BUT:

What about the person who has never bowled?

What about the casual park visitor?

What about the person who has heard of lawn bowls but doesn't know the sport exists in their town (or even State or Country)?

What about the people who think it is only for grumpy old men with English accents?

What about the people who hate wearing white? Or the fat old guys who can't even find white clothing in their sizes?

Realize:

1000 yards from your green, it is probably an invisible unknown sport - so sharing information and education is key. So make it as easy as possible for a shy stranger to come by and try rolling some bowls. It is a tactile and mental sport, and those first few rolls are key to the total future. And it will be easier for them if they know they are welcome, they know when to come, and they have something to read about it in advance.

NOTE: The most important requirement is a change of attitude.

2.1 Gate Promo Flyers

The single most effective (and cheapest) lawn bowls recruiting technique is to place informative one page flyers on both all gates to your green (in real estate weather proof plastic see through boxes) and to also have a plentiful supply of them at hand always in the club equipment room and clubhouse to hand to any and all visitor.

Encourage and promote them to all your existing members. This will make any of them more comfortable talking to strangers... as they can use the flyers as an intro, as well as a takeaway. Even in the middle of a social game, someone waiting on their turn can step out of their game briefly and say "Here is a flyer about our sport.. why not step inside the fence and watch for a while". Then when someone is free they can set up an immediate trial, or schedule a trial lesson, or sign them up for a course. Whatever you do... no visitor goes home a stranger or empty handed.

In the Appendix of this manual you will see a Sample Front and Sample Back page of a flyer that has been proven to work very well - though of course do feel free to add your own creative spin. Simple black and white works great... with double sided copies (so they only have to take one page home) from your favorite Kinkos.

The important items that must be on the front page are:

- A notice that Newcomers are always welcome
- A clear mention of what hours and days of week you regularly bowl
- A clear mention about classes and lessons with coach's phone number
- A basic requirements note: Only flat soled shoes and hat
- A website address for further information

A picture of someone (or more) people bowling in casual dress will also help create an idea of what it is all about and the friendly, welcoming attitude.

The back of the flyer should have a brief introduction to the sport. A number of these may already be floating around your club. We strongly recommend one with a diagram introducing at least the idea of bias and how a head develops. A sample is in the Appendix of this manual.

Note: Don't confuse people with too much info. Make a separate one for Summer and Winter.

2.2 Club Hours

To grow your club your recruiting target is primarily (but not exclusively) active adults over 40. This means that most of them are still working - in fact many of this boomer generation may never retire fully as their 401K systems are not the same as old life time pension plans.

Which means they can only bowl at weekends or after work. Plus in this day and age, their weekends are rather crowded, so they cannot burn a whole day bowling. Bottom line, move your bowling hours to mornings or afternoons, but not lunch hours, and you will immediately make it more convenient for working people, as well as busy retirees. Unlike older retired folks, workers typically eat lunch 12 to 1:30! Weather permitting, we have found 9:30am and/or 2:00pm as much, much better starting times than 12noon or even 12:30, plus 5pm one evening per week in summer.

Of course, if you have lights, then two evenings a week. But even then, busy working people catch up with errands and house chores and often only unwind and walk in the park come Sunday. So if you can, Sunday afternoon is the best time for walk-ins, casual games, newcomers' practice, etc. It only takes two of you to start with, then see what happens.

2.3 Signage

(A) Permanent Signage:

If someone is a block from your club, is there any street sign that says **Lawn Bowls ▶** ?

Why not ask the city if you can put up a professional one? Or offer to pay them? Or ask why they have a sign to their swimming pool and their tennis courts and their park but not to their lawn bowls green?

And if someone drives right by your gate, how clear is the sign at 20mph?

There are some clubs where you can be right at the correct spot to park, and still not see the green or know one is there. Of course all your members know some friend dragged them down. But strangers or visitors will need to (a) be conscientiously looking for you and (b) have access to Google Maps or your website.

And when they do get right to your gate, what does the welcome say? Does it sound like an old elite English Country Club where only particular members may play? Or does it say this is a city or community park and everyone is welcome. Please step inside and visit. Or visit ourlawnbowls.org or call to set up a free trial.

Of course, if it is closed at that time, they can then always take a flyer or note the website from the sign and from the flyer.

(B) Temporary Signage:

Most cities and parks have sign ordinances, restricting you from putting up permanent large signs. However, if you are discrete, and put them up only while the events are in place, and take them down afterwards, you probably offend no one... and in the meantime attract a lot of attention.

Many of you have already tried the big banner on the fence that reads "Open House Today" or "Free Trial Lessons". If these are still in good condition, take them down and store them for special occasions. If they are up all the time they wear badly and people stop noticing them.

If you don't have any big banner signs, order some today. But do not put specific dates or times on them, so you can re-use them again and again. How about one that says "Lawn Bowls Tournament Today / Spectators Welcome"? This is strongly recommended and has proven to be effective. Plus then spectators will start to see how tournaments are so competitive, and they will understand why, just for a change, you don't have time to talk to them or offer a trial roll.

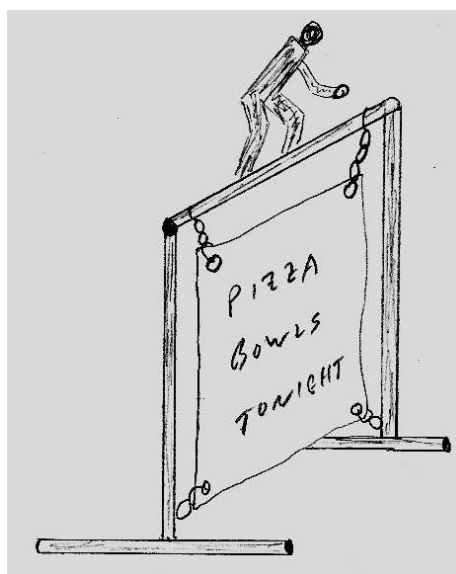
In addition, have some basic handyman in your club make a couple of "real estate open house" signs. These are stand up signs that you simple put out at the curb level or nearby corner, so people can be directed to the lawn bowls green on special occasions.

Rather than make a special sign for each occasion, see the design below (done with printing banners from Kinko's and the helpful hardware shop that cut all the pipe frame to size.. all handyman had to do was assemble and paint the frame). The mini banner sign portions are interchangeable for different events. Sometimes you may need two banners in a frame, if traffic can see you from both directions. These are very, very effective.... and if you put them out and take them away diligently (and only on certain days) then you will hear no complaints from the city or the neighborhood.

Since they were created as prototypes, the next versions will have bigger text, incidentally. And the original goal of saying Lawn Bowls across the top of the frame (in wood or steel) has yet to be achieved. However, they continue to work well as is. Also, Fast Signs, or a similar sign franchise, may be able to make better versions. They certainly print the signage cheaper than Kinkos.

Other sign variations might read:

- Bowling Lessons Tonight
- Pizza Bowls Tonight
- Private Bowls Function Today
- Open House Today - Everyone Welcome
- Open House Today - Try your hand at lawn bowls
- Tournament Today - Spectators Welcome
- Bowls Tournament - Spectators Welcome
- Bowls League Tonight



Original concept drawing:

Actual implementation:



And if you really want to get fancy (strongly recommended for division and national level tournaments) order some of these tall stand up signs that you can move around (you fill the base with a hose pipe to stop them blowing over). Pictures shown here are from what the sponsors provided at the National Senior Games when lawn bowls was first a demonstration sport in 2009.



2.4 Club Website

Do you know that people living 1000 yards from your green don't even know what the sport is or that your club exists? And how do people find information nowadays? Online of course!

Your cheapest and most powerful marketing outreach tool is a website. It is your club's connection to the outside world. If you don't have a web designer in your extended club network, pay a freelancer or professional design firm. It will pay for itself 10 times over in two years.

If all else fails, get a basic site up using some free web tools (like Yola.com, Google, Intuit, Yahoo or others) or build it as a Blog site (see www.wordpress.com). Whatever you do, have a site with your club name or initials in the domain, that says when you bowl, visitors always welcome, when your training courses are, how to rent the facilities, your tournament schedule and basic directions and contact information. Try to have a section for beginners to know they are always welcome, and give them some of the basics of the sport. When it is live, make sure you tell your divisional webmasters and the USLBA webmaster about your new site and its address, as well as registering it with Google, Yahoo, etc.

Some big side benefits of a website done right is that prospective newcomers are a lot smarter before they show up. They can read about the bias, the rules of the game, the organization of teams, etc. So when they come for a first lesson, they are thinking the right thoughts, instead of dealing with all the small other details. At least by then they should know it is not bocce, and yes, it is played in lanes on real grass, using special bowls and not round metal balls.

Another benefit is that it can become an electronic history of the club when done right. Each year, before the new tournaments and photos are added, the old pages should be archived with suitable links. Before you know it, you will be able to look back a few years and see who won what and how crazy was that hat at the party! You can even have your club historian post a complete summary history of the club. See <http://www.palbc.org/clubhistory.html> for a great example of this.

Notice we are starting to do all this with the USLBA website too. From 2008 onwards all data is archived. We hope we can select your site soon as one of our websites of the month!

PS Please make sure we have your current correct club information on USLBA.org as well as on your divisional website. Also, your webmaster is going to need help with collecting the right information and photos.... so make sure there is a designated photographer or two at every major occasion. This also helps document the history of the club.

NOTE: A website is but a collection of pages with names. Each individual page is separately laid out then they are linked to each other and to the outside world. Once you have a web authoring tool in place it is often more work editing the pictures than laying out pages.

2.5 Training Courses

Most lawn bowls clubs offer free trial lessons, but ironically, properly organized training courses with a small fee are more effective long term at recruiting members. Even in retirement communities it may be hard for you to get Mavis down for a free trial lesson. But if Mavis hears that some of her bingo partners are all signing up for a course, then she might too.

This is because many people do prefer structured courses. Some people just like courses and on-going education too. But more importantly, unless they have a lot of confidence, they like to not stand out as a klutz or slow learner. Also, they instinctively feel that the course will be better organized and more systematic if it is arranged and promoted as such - and there is a small fee for it. Maybe even homework and some notes too!

We recommend at least \$35 to \$50 per person for a 5 week course (one hour per week) run in conjunction with (and promoted through) your parks and rec. department. This gives it much broader coverage and publicity, makes it feel official, makes the citizens feel the city is doing something for them, and keeps lawn bowls visible to the parks and rec. and city officers themselves.

Of course, promote the courses through your own members, flyers, newsletter and website and run it after work or at the weekends (remember your prospects are working). And remind them to invite a friend or partner along too! After all, this is the one sport where ladies can compete regularly and successfully against their boyfriends or kids.

Finally, if the training course overlaps the time of a normal social game, students can see games in action as well as start to appreciate the friendship and camaraderie of the game. Plus, if needed, the coach can call for help, or one of the sunshine committee members can wander over and help with a warm welcome to the new students.

Two courses like this each year will be a big boost for your club. And you will be surprised how many say "I saw it in Spring and couldn't make it, but now I am here for the Fall class" or something to that effect.

2.6 Free Trial Lessons

This is the one recruiting technique that many clubs are already doing. But are you really getting any prospects? And are you keeping them?

To make them more effective, first see 2.5 above.

Secondly, schedule a standard time for free lessons. So many people have said they often meant to come by, then they finally had a Sunday (or Wed eve) free and here they are! Why didn't they call and schedule? Because people are busy and things change. And because they often come with a friend or partner.. so double scheduling issues arise.

Plus this is a lot easier for the coach too if they know they only have to cover certain sessions unless they get a call. That way it won't interfere with the club tournaments for example. And the draw master can set aside one lane on those days for lessons... and maybe one lane for beginners too.

Thirdly, make sure the coach is never overwhelmed or too busy or trying to teach advanced esoteric game ideas to newcomers on their first day. The goal of the first trial lesson is for them to get a feel for the game and a feel for the excitement of competing socially. So make sure they are bowling and not sitting around listening too much to long winded lectures and grand old stories. Detailed rules and style can all be learned later once they are signed up as club members.

If it is their second or third free trial lesson, the sunshine team should be turning on the heat to firmly but politely sign them up as members, all the time emphasizing what social and mental fun it is and what a great value for money. In fact, perhaps even the cheapest sport in the country. By this stage you should have their name and phone or email for follow-up and they should have a copy of the latest club newsletter and know your website address.

2.7 Parks and Rec. Liaison

If someone moves to your neighborhood, and approaches the city parks and rec. dept (in person, or via newspapers or bulletins or web), will they recommend lawn bowls as a possible adult activity? Are you even listed on their maps, guides and directories? They have much larger community outreach programs than your club will ever have but if they forget to include you, that is your problem and not theirs.

Make sure the data is current and complete. For some clubs, this is your only marketing presence online or in public, so give it the respect it deserves. And make sure you personally invite the city parks and rec. department down to bowl at least once a year. Even offer your club house for some of the city's small offsite meetings so you continue to stay on their radar.

Similarly, are you on the map of the city tourist board and the chamber of commerce? Have you offered to host the Rotarians or the Kiwanies or ?

AND... while you are about it, if your facility is available for rent for offsite meetings or other social functions, have you bothered tell anyone at the city? At the parks and rec. dept? At the newspaper directories? On your website?

Incidentally, if you are part of a parks and rec or community program, inviting them to have some of their smaller meetings at your club house rather than a boring conference room or hotel suite is a great way to make sure they appreciate you... and that gardening item line in next year's budget!

2.8 Initial Contacts

While this subject is covered more in the Member Retention Handbook, do realize that the first few weeks after a person first tries bowling are key to their long term involvement in the sport. Have someone (not necessarily the coach) make sure they follow up with everyone who took a trial lesson, a formal course, or signed up to be a member.

Make sure you help them be comfortable while they are still nervous about what they are getting into. Reassure them they can borrow bowls for quite a while before they have to spend real money, or help them get some used ones. Get them a club newsletter, key and directory, as well as a USLBA card as soon as possible and invite them down some more days. Then work with them to practice until they can join their first social game. Even then, they will miss a number of etiquette and protocol items. Expect they are thinking so hard about what they learned and how to roll the bowls that they will probably forget it is their turn to bowl, or rake or put up the score or throw the jack or whatever.

Adults learn by doing. A friendly partner can make their first few bowling days so much more enjoyable.. and it won't detract from your game either. After all, anyone can look good with a good partner. If you bowl in tough situations (like when your beginner partner is no help) you too will have to concentrate and perform... and will probably grow in the process. Remember you were a beginner not that long ago.

Perhaps you want to give out your phone number as a resource to call when they are in doubt. We have even found some who want to enter local tournaments their first season, but no one has told them about the sign up procedure or who is eligible.

3.0 Optional Recruiting Ideas

In the previous section we have been looking at basic concepts that all clubs should be doing week in and week out.

But few of us have the time to volunteer for recruiting every week. However, we all have a few weekends a year when we can do a special event, and frankly have fun and enjoy it and make it effective too.

Once again, the list below is not a total all encompassing list of ideas - it is simply the present list of ideas we have heard about successfully working at US clubs in the late 2008 and onwards timeframe.

Please share any other success stories with us too.

3.1 Open Houses

This promotional idea is known by most clubs. However now many members have become blasé about it and so they don't give their open house the full and proper treatment it deserves.

There is a comprehensive manual available from the SW division on how to run a proper Open House. It may be downloaded from their resources page, along with many other helpful documents. See <http://www.swlawnbowls.com/Resources.html>

Note that a large part of this manual is devoted to how to take credit cards at an Open House. Unless you really have this need, those sections can be initially skipped.

But running an Open House is like running a marketing program. You make a list of what has to be done and parcel it out. Let everyone help to make it a successful day, even if their only job is to go get the balloons and tie them all up. A few good Open Houses each year can bring out the energy and enthusiasm of your volunteers... energy that probably is not there week in and week out as they just want to get back to bowling or drinking tea.

An Open House is a great opportunity for publicity, and some attempts at this should always be made (see next chapter). Plus it is a great excuse for all members to go back to their own social network of friends (online and offline) and invite them to come over and join in. Many may be more willing at a general Open House than at a private lesson. So when you have made a flyer for the Open House, make sure each bowler takes home a few every time they come by the club in the weeks leading up to an Open House. Of course, post it on your website too, and encourage everyone to email the link to potential players.

A great way to plan a proper Open House is to build a spreadsheet checklist. Here is one used by many clubs for the Division Wide Open House in 2009, updated to show 2010 dates for the whole West Coast wide open house (they are always much more effective if more clubs participate on the same day... now you start to get the attention of the press and prospects).

Date	Item	Action Person	Comments
PLAN			
March	Get Volunteer Greeters, Coaches & photographer and plan shifts		Minimum of 2 greeters 2 coaches all the time
March	Prepare Ad insert		
March	Prepare Press Release		
March	Prepare press contact list		
March	Prepare flyers to hand out		
March	Prepare sign in books/forms and waiver (if need be)		

PREP

by Apr 17th	Get Open House details on Website	
by Apr 24th	Get / Find all banners and check them	
Week of Apr 26th	Give flyers to all members all week to invite friends	
Tues Apr 27th	Check ad inserts for weekend/next week	
Wed Apr 28th	Get DVD/Video and laptop or player checked out	
Thr Apr 29th	Send out your club specific press release (Email). Put on website.	
Fri Apr 30th	Call your local Press Editors/Reporters	They may be dying for a story.
Mon 3rd	Insert in all online Events sections of local papers - under sports and adult sections	
Wed 5th	Order balloons - Invite more friends	Must do .. Very effective
Thr 6th	Check flyers again	
Fri 7th	Get food & drinks	Coffee/bagles am Lemonade/Hotdogs for lunch

PERFORM

Sat May 8th OPEN HOUSE Day	10am to 3pm
Set out banners	
Set out balloons	
Prepare greeters table	
Set out food and drinks	
Set out flyers and newsletters	
Prepare video / DVD	
Set out bowls and 2 lanes close to club house	

POST PRODUCTION

Post photos on your website
 Put article in your newsletter
 Thank everyone
 Plan to contact all attendees within 2 weeks to invite them back

PS

Club coordinator ideally works only as a floater -
reliever and supervisor - problem solver on Open
House day itself.

Does it work?

This is the exact checklist used by a club in 2009 and they did run some paid ads (See 3.5 below). Even with a limited cadre of volunteers as the club had much earlier planned another big club social evening for that day, 35 new prospective bowlers showed up over the weekend (even though it was only billed as for Saturday). Wow.

3.2 Publicity / Public Relations

Every day in every newspaper, there is a reporter looking for a story, a photographer looking for some new and interesting subject matter, or an editor trying to fill up some column inches. What are the chances they wake up and think of covering lawn bowls?

Absolutely zero.

Zero that is unless you invite them, send them a notice, or even send them pictures and a story.

And the same goes for radio and TV stations.

But the interesting part is they are all waiting with open arms for you to contact them. Look at the mast head of any paper or magazine. They actually print how to contact the editor(s) with full email and phone number, etc. Or they have online posting forms with contacts on their websites.

And when PR works it is absolutely magic. You cannot control the exact details of the story, when it will come out (if at all) or what angle they will take. But people read and believe stories.. much more than advertising. And while it does take some time and effort, it does not cost anything else.

So start with making yourself a contact list of your own local media. When you get going, you will see this is longer than you thought, even in a small town, by the time you have tracked every little publication, radio and TV station. For the bigger papers, track both the editor and the sports or managing editor if you can. Save them all in a spreadsheet (from where you can easily cut and paste them into an email program).

Then politely send them a message about every open house and every tournament your club runs. Send announcement notices in advance, and success stories and photos afterwards. Keep it short and succinct - you really want them to call and discuss... Put your whole message in the body of the email.... no attachments until you are having a dialog with someone.

And in between major events, try to find a personal contact and invite them down to discover this magic unknown sport. Even give them teasers: Have you ever wondered why all those folks were standing around in white on that green patch in the park? Or: If it is not bocce, then what is it? Or: Did Francis Drake really do this? And Walt Disney?

Even invite them down to try bowls. In fact you should often invite them down to try it. And if a reporter or photographer comes by, offer to hold their pad or camera while they roll a few bowls. Everyone's perception of the game changes one they try it themselves and get a feel for how easy it is to learn but how hard it is to be good.

And, of course, treat all reporters and press media as royalty. Brief your colleagues, introduce them around, let them get quotes from different people, emphasize how more and more younger people are playing the game and winning the big events, and how it is a truly international sport

with the same rules and regulations. To help them document a story, provide them copies of your flyers, newsletter and website, as well as a contact phone number and email address.

Examples: See past successes from clubs in the NEWS section of <http://www.uslba.org/news.html>. Behind every one of these club or player stories, there is another story... of the volunteer who made the call or sent the email or caught the arm of a reporter! If you had to pay for this kind of coverage it would cost you a fortune.

Note: Send copies of your press news to neighboring clubs, your parks and rec dept, your city newsletter, your webmaster (very important to post it on your site), your division and even USLBA too, so we can all help spread the word about lawn bowls in America.

For bigger occasions or events, when you really have some special news, you may even want to put out a press release. Don't worry if no media picks it up the first time. Keep pushing and sooner or later you will get coverage. Then you start to properly establish relationships with the press - for future contacts and information.

There are many websites available nowadays that help you write and distribute a press release for nothing or a small fee. Not as good as using a PR firm or consultant, but better than nothing. Some examples are PR.com, PRWeb.com, and many others if you Google them. Choose the ones that are most aligned with sports or social matters.

Some clubs already have designated Publicity Directors. We commend them and suggest that others soon get people to do this work and be ready to talk to the press at a moment's notice. For someone who can speak and write fairly well, this is also a very gratifying function. For a youngster, it is a way to earn marketing communications credits and portfolio experience.

Finally, most small magazines nowadays (and even many of the bigger ones) have very slim staffs. So why not write a story yourself, and submit it to some active lifestyle for adults magazine or your own local paper? You can have fun doing it. Worst case they say know. On the other hand, you might suddenly be a published writer. Of course you need a real story and some hook or punch line. Grumpy old men bowling still bowling at 80 is not a story - unless you develop some interesting character study or amusing sideline.

Please do share all your success stories with your divisional newspapers, as well as the USLBA newsletters and marketing team so we can all help spread the word and stop being such an invisible, unknown, niche sport.

PS If you have a story angle or opportunity, but do not feel you can adequately write it up, contact someone on the USLBA marketing committee and we will find a writer to interview you and write the article.

3.3 Online or Print Notices

Ever noticed those lists of upcoming events in your local paper? Or on your local news website? Or the local sports paper that lists all the walks, 10K runs, gardening tours, estate open houses, activities for seniors, etc. etc.?

How does your local newspaper or online bulletin board know all that stuff? How can they afford to go around and track it all?

The answer is simple. They don't. They just enable the process.

So... all you have to do is go online (even for most of printed lists nowadays), find their websites, and fill in your information in the format they want it. Voila! Your event is listed in print and online.

And almost all of these are free. But who will do it? Can't find a computer centric person free at your club? Then bribe a kid or grandkid. They will whiz through this exercise. But do give them accurate brief information.

Note: In most cases, you are very restricted by a small word count. No problem. Use a catchy headline and include your website for more details. Then your webmaster can post whatever you want in detail.

The only problem with these notices is they expire quickly. Two weeks is not unusual. So keep track as you go, then next time you can find all the places to do the postings quicker. You can even cut and paste standard messages in there.

Don't forget to use bulletin boards like Craigslist too. Free advertising. May not work. But certainly will with repetition.

Finally, the first place you should list all Open Houses or Training Course or Free trial lessons is your own parks and rec. or community bulletin boards and publications. That is why they are there! You probably even run under their guidance to some extent or other. It is good to show them what you are doing to help the whole community and to emphasize you are not just a club for an elite few old members. See also 2.7 above.

3.4 Clubhouse/Green and Corporate Facilities Rental

Many clubs say they rent out their facilities for special events, parties, wedding receptions or offsite corporate meetings. But how many times a year do they do this? With a little bit of effort you can soon be turning away groups and deciding just which ones you want to host.

By marketing and promoting your facilities for these events, you are exposing a much larger population group to lawn bowls. And some might just be interested enough to return, especially if the competitive bug got them in some basic head to head beginners bowls afternoon. Plus it is a great way to show (a) what a social sport it is and (b) that ladies can hold their own and play with the men.

However, these functions do not usually lead to many immediate new bowler recruits. They are better used as long term marketing functions and as fund raisers.... so then you have the money to do an Open House right say.

The best way to promote your facilities is to think backwards from where would a meeting planner find you. Realize: they probably don't know lawn bowls, they probably don't know what facilities you have, and they probably don't know if you will host (and help lead) a bunch of novices, they don't know how many you can accommodate.

So how are you going to let them know?

(a) Make a one page facilities rental flyer.

Headline it Lawn Bowls Club Rental (or similar)

Include an overview diagram

Show how many you can seat

Spell out details of kitchen

Suggested usages etc

Maximum occupancy (too small for most weddings but OK for some receptions)

Green usage policy (must have flat soled shoes or bare feet)

Max number of bowlers (depends on how many loaner bowls you have)

Suggest some usages:

Small offsite corporate meeting

Family social party

Corporate offsite team rewards outing/bonding

Kiwanis/Rotaries annual fund raiser or similar

Inter department social challenge

College graduation party

White party or wedding reception

(b) Promote it on your website (very important) as most meeting planners search online nowadays.

Create its own webpage with above information

Use all the above words so Google can trip over them
Register your site with Google and Yahoo and list it also with keywords like
Offsite meetings, facility rentals, wedding receptions, etc

(c) Let the parks and rec. department know

In fact, invite them to have their meetings (for free)

See where they suggest listing it (they rent many of their halls etc for
special occasions too)

Finally, this means you will need a central common calendar to track all such events, and to ensure you don't overload your volunteer bowling coaches with too many dates. If you are full up, please recommend the next club you know down the street.

3.5 Bring a Friend Event

This is a proven successful and fun way to recruit, though it requires that a few members go out of their way to do something special. Something like offering to cater a dinner to show off what they learned on that cooking trip to Italy or the South of France. Or how to have a proper Cinco De Mayo party with proper Pinatas (and maybe Pina Collada's too), or a real Oktober Fest or.....

The big catch is that to attend the party you have to bring at least one guest to try lawn bowling in advance. Usually we have the member sponsor the guest for dinner too. Now how can that good friend of yours say maybe one day anymore?

Be strict about it... no friend, no dinner (unless you are on kitchen crew). You will know it is working when people are trying to borrow a friend!

Can also be done with Champagne Breakfast or fancy lunch events... but needs a special touch of some sort.

3.6 Advertising

Advertising works but costs money. But it only really works if it is done repetitively (at least 3 times or don't bother) and if there is some specific "Call to Action" message. If you are a poor struggling financially club, this is probably not an option and you will first have to employ many of the other techniques in this guide. Remember though, membership solves everything... so poor clubs that were can now advertise to increase their pull once their membership has grown.

If you are a club fortunate to be sitting on a large bank balance, what is your duty towards the donors of those funds? To preserve it until the last of your members die out? Or to use it to grown and promote the sport for future generations - so they too may have the countless hours of enjoyment you have had lawn bowling?

Sample ads are included in the [SW LawnBowls Open House Guidelines Manual](#) (ask webmaster for variations and updates if you are in SW).

Sample ads created for a specific club are listed on the marketing page of the [USLBA website](#) (bottom right). Ad 5 was selected as the finalist. It ran 4 days - Tues through Friday - as a 1/4 page color ad in the local newspaper sports section at a cost of \$500 (3 day rate..before negotiations:). This is the ad that helped pull in 35 prospects in one weekend. All ads were developed as a volunteer service by David Hale, a keen novice bowler at the club.

4.0 Extra Points

There are many other things you can do to try and promote your club. This section contains some suggestions that we feel work and do contribute, even though we cannot specifically prove the return on investment.

So for the items with a low investment threshold we suggest you try them anyway. It never hurts. It may help. Marketing awareness is often a series of prospective bowler "touch points" that add up to some final action. Maybe you can even improve on them. Please share your success with us so we can spread the news to other clubs too.

For items that cost real money, proceed with caution or employ professional help. Real bad amateur mailers, for example, are probably best not done. But if you have access to proper skills and services by all means try it out.

4.1 Listing in City Parks and Rec. Sites and Circulars

This is something every club can do, yet we are often remiss in the execution because we don't know who is responsible - either at our club or at the city or community office.

First of all, in your own club. Don't try to figure out who is responsible. Just do it or offer to go with your liaison person to the city.

On the city end, you probably have a city parks and rec. contact point, even if you don't know it. But they are friendly if you simply show up and say: "I am from your/our city lawn bowls club. Please can you help me."

Have you ever visited the city or community's own web site. Many of them are quite extensive nowadays. Did they list Lawn Bowls on their recreation and parks things to do? On their adult activities? On their ongoing education curriculum? On their tourist maps? On their Chamber of Commerce maps?

If they didn't don't blame their webmaster. Blame yourself for not emailing and checking all the latest contact and relevant information. There is always a webmaster contact button on these websites. Just use it - and make sure they properly link back to your club website for more information.

Also make sure you are in all their directories as well as their city flyers, circulars and newsletters.

If your club is part of retirement community, change the word city to community above and do the same. Just because people drive past the green each day doesn't mean they know what is going on behind the fence or hedge.

PS While you are about it, make sure your club is properly listed on the USLBA website as well as on your division's website, with a live working link to your website.

4.2 Video

Many of the aspects of the joy, challenge and heartache of lawn bowls cannot easily be captured in simple words and photos. To truly understand the sport you need to try it. However, a good video can capture some of the excitement of a head developing, of people's emotions being contained or released, of the head to head competition, of the rotation of team members, of the social aspects of a sports club where almost anyone has sufficient skill, and can afford to play.

While making videos with proper editing is never easy, the field is exploding. With plenty of sunshine you can even make a halfway decent video with an iPhone or Flip camera.

Newport Harbor club has made a great intro movie and this is available for your club to link to or to put on your website. In fact, their Open House manual recommends you put it on a laptop and have all would be bowlers first review it before they step onto the green.

Internationally there are great lawn bowls videos - even a full length movie that spoofs old English bowling habits ("Black Bowls???").

If you do get some unique new video, do not wrestle with putting it on your website. Simply upload it to YouTube and put a link to it on your website or newsletter. For example, here is a professional video promoting the 2012 World Games in Australia:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XWPgZZIafPI&feature=related>

You too can use these links, just like you see on home page of USLBA.org. And the nice thing is then YouTube prompts the viewer to watch other lawn bowls videos... and pretty soon they are hooked.

4.3 Door Flyers

We have listed this simple technique under extra points, as it does take some leg work and a little money. Also, we have mixed results feedback from clubs who have tried it. By going door to door and putting a flyer on the handle or in the mailbox, you may get a lot of attention. But which doors? Many bowlers travel from miles around to their favorite club, so this technique probably works best in closely contained communities.

Even then, like most marketing advertising techniques, you will have to do it at least 3 times to get real results. It will naturally work better if combined with some special event like an Open House or newcomer's dinner.

And while you are out putting up door flyers, you may as well put some on all community and public notice boards, as well as at the golf club, 10 pin bowls club, supermarket, pub, etc. Remember however that most people do not know what lawn bowls is all about. Some people even think it is when you set up plastic 10 pins on your back lawn. So your flyer has to have some basic information.... and for sure a link to your website. Why not just use your gate flyer as a basis for designing this... maybe even with the game summary on the back?

4.4 Direct Mail

We have heard of no one having success with direct mail to promote lawn bowls so far in the USA. Even when it went out with the utility bill or city notices.

However, some clubs have had minor success by getting into the actual city or mayoral notices or email.

If you think you have a new angle on this, and are prepared to experiment, then that is great. We suggest you test market first before spending a lot of money. This scheme is probably best done if you have funds and very few members - see 5.2 Marketing Agency below.

5.0 Alternatives:

When you are keen to help your club grow (so that it doesn't shrink), there are many professional alternatives out there to help. Some even specialize in non-profits. Many even specialize in sports marketing. Some will work for free (yes - it is called pro bono by agencies and internship or resume credits by students and others out of work).

Even if you pay them, you will still need to direct and guide them. The chances they know lawn bowling are slim..... so take them out on the green first of all and let them try score some points!

5.1 Professional Web Services:

For many clubs it may be advantageous to have a full or part time professional create your website, at least initially. Once again, there are many web designers in the country, but few that know lawn bowls, so you need to be prepared to educate one about what you want, or need to find someone that has already done a site that you like.

For the latter, visit as many USLBA websites as you can and notice that most of them have a webmaster contact (often small print at the bottom). All the known sites are listed as part of the club listings on www.USLBA.org.

e.g. if you visit the outstanding SE Division website (www.sedlawnbowls.org) , you will see a hot button at the bottom of the page: Site Designed and Developed by www.Chambersystems.com. They have also done the [St Petersburg Club](#) site.

In every town there are web designers, though you don't even need to be local to do the job. A professional or keen amateur will have the right tools and experience to get a site up and functioning well (and keep it that way) quickly. Any web designer, however, will need your input on text, content to carry and its navigation priorities and photographs.

NOTE 1: A website is never done. It is a form of electronic newspaper / bulletin board. So arrange up front how changes will be made, how information will be posted, how this year's information will be kept live (albeit at a lower link level) as next year's comes to the fore, etc. etc. This way your website becomes a living historical picture of the club too - all the winners, all the tournaments, all the fun at the recruiting events, etc etc. Members do appreciate seeing their results up quickly, with photos, especially if they win! You will probably have to co-opt some club members into being assistant photographers. Any of today's small digital cameras take good enough pictures for websites (with some cropping, scaling and editing).

NOTE 2: There are two separate parts to a website. The domain name, and the website and its hosting itself. We strongly recommend that someone in the club claim and register and protect your domain name. Using GoDaddy.com (the biggest and best) a domain name is under \$12 per year. e.g. you claim MyTownLBC.org and perhaps MyTownLBC.com too if it is available. If you don't renew each year you will lose it - which is a big problem! For further info on this subject email webmaster@uslba.org. And please don't make the name too long.. it might not fit on all those flyers or banners or balloons or web table and people will make too many tying mistakes.

Separately your webmaster will find a web hosting service (it should not be the same as your domain registrar) and tell you how to set your domain to point to the right place. You need this control in case you ever change webmasters or don't like (or pay) the hosting service. Websites need to be up 100% of the time, so there are hosting companies that specialize in this.

5.2 Professional Marketing Services:

When Santa Monica Lawn Bowls club was in dire straits (membership wise) a few years ago, they presold some longer term membership to raise money, plus they dug into their coffers which had previously been funded with some nice endowments, then they hired a marketing agency to promote the club and help them recruit members. Plus they separately engaged an experienced lawn bowler web designer. Today this is a thriving club and they do their own marketing and websites... because they never abdicated all the work and authority. Even with professional help they stayed very involved and learned along the way. And in a very clever move, they mostly paid the agency based on results... like so much per new member signed up!

Your club may consider a similar move if you have a way of funding it.