

PR and Marketing Committee Report

Spring 2019, Susan Grigg & Robert Pries Co-Chairs

Membership:

Some years back, despite the precipitously falling membership, no one on the board was willing to try to stem the loss and risk failure. In the vacuum the PR committee stepped forward and created the membership contest, the voucher program, advertisement on Facebook and social media, etc. We tried to create more value for members through the wiki and *News & Notes*. The membership curve flattened for a couple of years. But enthusiasm wanes when it is not supported. You ask, "What membership contest?"

On reading how Harry Gleason sent out 400 handwritten personal letters to gardeners and horticulturalists, I think are we still this enthusiastic. He may have been disappointed that only 60 showed up for the first meeting, but by the end of the year there were 600. Of course Harry had an ulterior motive; he wished to create an Iris test and display garden at the New York Botanical Gardens. His efforts were a success and the new AIS signed contracts with 3 botanical gardens to create display/test gardens.

Currently, we need new ideas for increasing membership, but we also need enthusiasm for the old ones.

Publicity:

The cost of advertising is very expensive; as a dying organization we had little to spend in this regard. Through the good fortune of some magnificent bequests we now might be able to reverse this process. **I propose an advertising budget of \$10,000 a year.** If we know the money is available, we can spend the time to research the best options, but until now that was a waste of time.

In the past I have asked for someone to volunteer to do press releases. No one has stepped forward. I am asking again. I am sure the whole board could help in generating ideas!

News & Notes:

N&N has been a phenomenal success and Wayne has done a heroic job of maintaining it month after month: Presently it goes only to members, but about half of the members of affiliated clubs are not AIS members. Perhaps if we offered a free newsletter, maybe only 3 or 4 times a year, we could get some of these members to join. **I suggest authorizing a limited free newsletter.**

Increasing Value:

Ask yourself what is the value in AIS membership? Is it really something you could sell to someone? Usually members of an organization are given special discounts, as opposed to non-members. Often members receive special services or products. The bulletin is obviously the biggest item in this category, but is that all we can imagine?

Whatever happened to discounts on books? Unfortunately, we have to have some books to sell and we have produced nothing new as an organization. Although members have written iris books, we have done little to promote them and get discounts for our membership. Note that the responsibility for Publications was assigned to the PR Committee when no one else wanted to deal with it. Again, we need enthusiastic volunteers.

When was the last time one has seen an ad for AIS sweatshirts in the AIS Bulletin?

Webinars:

Sometime ago we were authorized to do webinars. Unfortunately, the volunteers quit. It strikes me that it would be possible to create some programs with local clubs using Zoom like we do with the Board meeting. I would like to ask for volunteers to work on this once again.

Conclusions:

We have all gotten older and perhaps more tired, but we cannot say that AIS has been operating at its best for many years. Perhaps the newer generation of board members will have the fortitude to accomplish what is needed. If the organization was running at its best, then we could say that membership loss is inevitable; but it hasn't been and some other organizations have started to gain members again. As we plan to celebrate the 100th Anniversary of AIS, now is a great time to renew our enthusiasm and our efforts.

Action Items:

1. Proposal to authorize the PR and Marketing Committee to add \$10,000 to their annual budget for advertising of AIS membership in flower and garden related publications.
2. Proposal to make *News and Notes* available four (4) times each calendar year to all members of every AIS affiliate, regardless of their membership in AIS.