

PR Committee Report

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Bulletin advertising

The plan to revitalize the American Iris Society is finally beginning to have effects. The New Bulletin format seems to have membership losses leveling out as of last spring and should begin to show growth. A more colorful Bulletin should attract and hold members better than previously. To this effect we make the following motion: **That all Bulletin advertising be in color and the rates set at the lower current Black and White rates.** There is no need to charge more for color since it does not increase the printing costs and the lower rates may help to keep and increase our present advertisers. As the membership grows, rates might increase, but for now we should use this opportunity to encourage more advertising.

Reciprocal ad with the American Hemerocallis Society

With the groundwork done by Bob Keup and Bill Maryott the plan to have reciprocal ads in the fall issue of *Iris* and the *Daylily Journal* came to fruition. Andi Rivarola created the AIS ad with input from members of the committee and President Judy Keisling, and Version 10 produced the final product.

Motion: **That the PR and Marketing Committee would like to pursue extending the reciprocal ad arrangement with the Hemerocallis Society, so that every addition of *Iris* and the *Daylily Journal* will have the ads.** We have asked Meg McKenzie Ryan, Executive Editor of the *Journal*, to bring the matter before the AHS Board at their fall meeting in October. This extended exposure to the AIS ad would have more impact than just a one-time appearance.

Electronic promotion

Another step in the process of gaining new members is E-membership. With current difficult economic times we might save some memberships with the lower E-membership cost. Past polls indicated that many members would choose to have both services, print and digital. One way to find people interested in Iris is through Facebook. It was proven last spring that we could increase Facebook friends by Facebook ads. Through a grant to the PR Committee, ads increased the Facebook friends to 3500 in the three spring months prior to the convention. We propose doing the same in the coming months. We suspect that, we can perhaps attract at least 175 new E-members from Facebook by next June. Another method of advertising is a complicated use of Google Adwords and the Iris

Encyclopedia. This should also bring in an additional 175, totaling 350 new members. The combined Electronic promotions should cost \$2000 but could generate \$5500 in E-memberships. We make the following motion: **That the PR committee is authorized to spend \$2000 in Electronic promotion.** It is important to note that if we satisfy these new members with our services they will continue to renew each year.

Annual Report

We can not forget our print members and many of the pillars of our society have expressed a concern that they are no longer appreciated. For the non-digital members we propose printing an Annual Report that would be **available on request**. Since this would only include such things as Board minutes, list of judges, exhibition reports, etc. it could be printed out as needed and mailed from a member of the PR Committee. We believe that less than 200 people would request this report and with mailing costs it would amount to \$400, but if it saved 200 long-term valued members, its value to the Society would be \$5000 in print memberships. We make the following motion: **That the PR Committee will produce an Annual Report available on request.**

Coupon Program

Although we can attempt to rely on these new steps, it would be wise to augment them with other promotions. As pointed out for the last two board meetings the Daylily Society has had good success with a coupon program: new members and members upgrading their membership receive a coupon. These coupons are honored by participating nurseries providing that value in free plants with an order from the member. It is up to the nursery how they honor the coupon, and they can be competitive in the deals they offer to attract these potential customers. We make the following motion: **That the AIS create a coupon program for new and upgrading members and that it should be instituted as soon as the PR Committee can garner 5 or more participating nurseries.**

Future

Careful analysis of the horticultural universe leads me to believe that the AIS could and should be at 20,000 members. If we continue to put the needs of our members first and understand their desires, that number may be realized. Until very recently we have been reactive and not proactive. If we move forward more briskly we can be a vibrant organization. If we think about how to do our jobs better we can move the organization forward. We should not resist change, but rather see the opportunities it represents. Whether we like it or not, the world is different than it was ten years ago. We need to move at a pace that approaches the real world.

State of the Organization

This Spring we had some great statistics. The AIS website was being viewed by a great many people and it appeared it was doing even better than the Daylily Society, which we use as a benchmark. This Fall our stats are dismal. The AIS website is statistically less successful than a year ago and declining rapidly. There is but one thing that is different: the prior 6 months we were aggressively advertizing on Facebook. Since E-membership did not come at the last board meeting, we withdrew our ad campaign, since optimally it

was best suited to gain new E-members. We are convinced it did gain some new print members, but its real potential has yet to be seen. We believe this proves that sensible advertising works but to optimize its success all the pieces need to be in place. If the board passes all of the preceding motions, and E-membership, the shopping cart, etc. are functional, we believe there could be dramatic increases in membership. Being able to offer free Iris with membership could be a huge attraction. In speaking to a horticultural intern recently, Bob heard him say the only reason he did not join plant societies is he wanted to spend his limited funds on plants.

Some Possibilities for further action

1. Could we find a way to provide grants of membership to young horticultural professionals?
2. Could we design a booklet on how to use the Iris Society and get the most out of membership for new members, (actually many old members could use this knowledge also)?

State of the Encyclopedia

Good News! We are finished restructuring. For those who do not know, due to poor communication with our electronic consultants, we had to essentially move 32,000 pages of the Encyclopedia a page at a time. It took seven grueling months of work, but now we can get back to constructing the Encyclopedia. Work also continued as we restructured and the Encyclopedia added 6,000 cultivars during this time. But before, we were averaging 2,000 each month. Now I expect the Encyclopedia to have all the cultivars detailed in the Iris Register within 10 months and many more that are not in The Register. Users now number 295 with many more who contribute but have not registered (Our docents put up images for them). Many more would be registering but the registration process has been disrupted too often by the host.

Established topics still under development include:

1. Hybridizer biographies
2. Awards
3. Historic Irises

New topic areas include:

1. A photo gallery of the tall-bearded symposium for 2010
2. A photo gallery the 50 favorite dwarf Irises
3. A topic called **Seeds** giving sources, germination and culture, and a photo gallery for identification and verification
4. A topic called **Iris Shows** where there is a calendar of Iris Shows and Displays, where each has its own page for developing a photo-essay about that show

Topics being worked on:

1. A glossary of terms
2. A dictionary of color patterns
3. A history of AIS
4. A topic for Novelty Irises
5. Public and private display gardens by Region

Despite the decline in views of the AIS website during the last six months, the Encyclopedia (which is in a separate domain and not included in general website stats) has continued to grow in viewers. Some months produce as many as 50,000 visitors. The synergism of the Encyclopedia, Facebook, and the AIS blog are exciting many new potential members and as E-membership becomes available we should gain from these activities. Until now there has been no bill for the Encyclopedia, but we now are closing in on 20 gig of server space and this has caused numerous disruptions in service. Chris Lindsey has agreed to double the server space for a yearly charge of \$500. This is already incorporated into the budget for the Adwords campaign. Unfortunately, Fall brings a decline in internet gardening sites with the ebb in December, but the E-memberships have started their promotion immediately, although I do not expect a huge response until May and June of 2012. **The following statement has just been added to many pages of the Encyclopedia.** “Although the Encyclopedia is free to all, it is supported by E-membership in AIS. If you would like to help sustain this reference, for \$15 you can become an E-member, [[click here](#)].” The reader is sent to the AIS website where they would join.

State of Social Media

Facebook and Twitter

We currently have over 3600 followers to the AIS Facebook Page. The great majority of these followers are **not** AIS members, which makes for a great potential to our new E-membership. The AIS Facebook gets approximately 100,000 hits each month; there are 2900 active users, but we can easily double those numbers by June. (Last month the Encyclopedia got 200,000 hits.) Facebook is here to stay and interaction with iris enthusiasts is now as common as turning on the TV and watching a show. Over two hundred followers on our Twitter account also commonly interact with us.

World of Irises – The Blog

Having only started in March 2011, World of Irises has had over 13,000 hits so far – a tremendous success. This signifies that the world is watching and this is an important medium to disseminate iris information and a huge exposure to our society. Current bloggers in our team include: Mike Unser, Jim Hedgecock, Jim Murrain, Patrick O’Connor, Renee Fraser, Debbie Strauss, Griff Crump, Bob Hollingworth and Andi Rivarola. These individuals write about a variety of iris topics, their experiences in their own geographical locations, and even uniqueness of iris subjects. The target audience for The Blog is **not** current AIS membership, so the potential for NEW E-membership here is very strong. Via blog listings, we have been able to connect with the landscape and gardening world, which in case you have noticed, is very active and diverse in the social media environment. Potentially, there’s much more that can be done with social media, such as iris growing techniques via video, instructional video on how to market local iris shows or iris sales via social media, how to connect with others in your community to be able to promote your club, etc. Also, we’re working on producing more connectedness between all the different mediums, to include the AIS website and AIS Encyclopedia.