

Public Relations & Marketing Committee Fall 2013

The Public Relations & Marketing AIS Committee has added a number of members and now includes; Susan Grigg and Bob Pries (co-chairs), Andi Rivarola, Chuck Winter, Kathleen Sonntag, Ron Killingsworth, Ron Cosner, Wayne Messer, Eileen Secrest, and George Boyce. Most work has been done by differing subgroups so we're including their reports here as separate topics.

1. Social Media (Andi Rivarola).
2. Voucher Program (Andi Rivarola & Susan Grigg)
3. Membership campaign
4. Constant Contact (Wayne Messer, Bob Pries)
5. Iris Encyclopedia
6. 100th Anniversary (George Boyce, Andi Rivarola, Paul Gossett)

AIS Social Media Report Fall 2013

The American Iris Society has a powerful social media presence through a wide range of venues:

World of Irises - The Blog of The American Iris Society

Pageviews last month	10,050
Pageviews all time history	187,608

Facebook	7924 Followers
Google Plus	2870 Followers
Twitter	320 Followers

The purpose of each of these mediums is to keep in the public's attention the work of The American Iris Society. (We keep plugging in pictures and articles through all of our venues. Each Blog article is automatically posted on Facebook via Networked Blogs, so the public can interact both via comments on the blog or Facebook. Current bloggers are exceptional with informative plus masterfully crafted images. New contributors to the Blog are always welcome).

Social Media's main general goal is to offer interaction and information to its target audience: the public. Even though many AIS members take part in social media, the majority of its participants are not AIS members. How do we know this? Because many of the interactions that take place at these sites generate a type of question, which is indicative of non-membership. "Is that an orchid or an iris?", "Can I grow irises in my area?", "Where do I find this or that type of iris variety?" etc.

Many people ask this question: Can Social Media sell?

My answer to this question is: it depends what you are selling.

I personally believe that we're not in the business of selling. I assume this for different reasons. First of all we do not have a large inventory of retail items, and/or not many of the items we do have are new to the public. For example, a book publisher (who is in the business of selling) has a goal of publishing a book, let's say, every month. The new book becomes a new Marketing strategy that propels the business and brings it much needed publicity. It's the same for retail stores and so on. We at AIS do not have the new item and thus are missing the marketing opportunity.

Here's an example of a list of activities on "how to sell" via social media that I recently received from a business newsletter:

5 Ways to Sell With Social Media

- 1- Incorporate a Clear Call to Action
- 2- Convey a Sense of Urgency
- 3- Offer Fans and Followers Special Deals
- 4- Encourage Sharing
- 5- Keep All Your Social Media Profiles Current

Non-profit organizations also can sell, if they have a large array of items that they generate as new, just like regular business does. A good example of this is the **National Wildlife Federation**. Please Google them to find an amazing variety of products they offer and for a perfect example of how to sell items.

New items bring attention to any organization, but since we are not in the business of creating new items in order to sell, my assumption is that what we mainly provide is: **information**.

Most non-profit organizations that have restricted saleable activities or items like ours do we what do, which is to use its social media focus as part of their overall Marketing and Public Relations campaign.

Assessment

In the sense that we have so much to offer via social media, I think we're successful at what we do. Could we do better? Yes, but then we should also be in the business of selling new items more often so that we can generate the publicity and attention we seek.

What are we offering?

Because social media is only a venue to help sell items to the public, our current system is limited to the number of items the AIS has to produce revenue.

Membership dues are The American Iris Society's most important source of revenue, but as membership keeps declining, the AIS should diversify its sources of revenue, such as: making it more appealing to give/receive more donations, and producing more saleable items, such as books or other publications.

Andi Rivarola
Social Media Manager for AIS

AIS Voucher Report

With 550 vouchers sent to new or upgrading members we can't know how many of those memberships were the result of this program, but the participating nurseries were polled and indicated that the vouchers **are** being used. One nursery reported that they had received more than 15 of the vouchers with the corresponding orders. Almost every nursery has received vouchers.

Since there are cutoff times for shipping for most nurseries, the expiration date of the voucher made using it a problem for members joining in the last quarter. To solve this problem the expiration date from vouchers has been removed.

Three new nurseries have joined the list of those participating: Mt. Pleasant Iris Farm, Iris Sisters Farm, and Iriswarehouse. I expect to add more to the list by January 2014.

Susan Grigg, Committee co-chair

AIS Membership Campaign Report

It is too soon to evaluate the membership campaign since entries are not due until March, giving each contestant a whole year to gather members. It is my personal view that although it has been talked about in the Bulletin twice and in News and Notes, many are still unaware and it will not be until the first year is awarded at convention that most members will be aware. I have had two inquiries for more information. Certainly the board can take some comfort that membership is flat and our precipitous decline seems to have ended. The potential for growth is excellent, but requires enthusiasm.

Local affiliate Eastern NC Iris Society gained 11 new members garnered mainly at its sale. If each affiliate did this we would have 2,000 new members. It is then the responsibility of the national organization to provide enough benefits that membership perceived as being worthwhile. The local club can also affect retention by being welcoming and providing quality activities. Many local clubs are imploding because they have not gathered younger, enthusiastic members and older members are tired. Can the national organization provide enough benefits to save the new members?

News & Notes Report

I am not going to apologize for this long message because it has been my experience that many difficulties arise because individuals do not understand the purposes and missions of AIS and/or

its parts. For that reason I am laying out the history, purpose, mission and scope of News & Notes.

N&N was hatched while I was brainstorming with Kelly Norris (editor) about how to save the AIS and have it functioning as a successful non-profit organization. Kelly pointed out that his generation expects regular contact. Social media provides some daily interaction. The Bulletin comes out quarterly, but there was lacking an in-between time frame.

Kelly's second point was that the Bulletin, if it was going to persist as a handsome magazine, often had much material that just did not work and had to be rejected. Topics could be too arcane, scientific, long, or not of general interest. Even topics that could be edited to an acceptable Bulletin format had lots of material that was of value that needed to be cut. Kelly suggested a monthly newsletter but in a format you did not have to read through. In other words, the format we have adopted with Constant Contact. In essence N&N is a list of web pages (URLs) as links. One can see a brief description of the material one would see by going to the webpage. The e-mail itself is small and does not overload mailboxes but it can contain volumes of text and photo galleries, computer games and videos.

N&N can act as a supplement to bulletin articles. A less wise Bulletin editor would perceive this as redundant, competition or even worse, an attack on their turf. Kelly saw this as freeing him to make the best presentations for the medium (the Bulletin) with which he was working. The same topic presented on a website would have a very different presentation, as would even differently something presented in a collaboration platform. An example The Bulletin has pictures of the top award winners. That is consistent with its appealing magazine approach. To provide a huge list of all categories would be a deadly approach for a magazine but works well on a website. Such a list can be downloaded and used by individuals for their own use. The awards list on the Encyclopedia serves yet a different purpose of reference and links to more information and pictures. Each works in a different way. N&N can link to all the electronic formats.

A point to be considered is that N&N cannot always send someone directly to a website. Many websites have too many topics on a page. Often a topic that one would want to link to, is farther down the webpage than is visible when the page is opened. In such cases sending someone to that page would confuse them.

However, there are many interesting Iris things we can point to on the internet in all types of websites. N&N can also help provide timely AIS official information. Of course the readers can choose to ignore any topic but that is not unlike information posted on the website or in the Bulletin. In fact if we really want our members to know something all venues should be utilized. The limitation of N&N is that a topic must appear somewhere electronically if we are to link to

it. A sentence or two is possible in N&N but anything longer must have another electronic home. The other mandate for certain types of information is that it comes out quickly. N&N publishes around the first of each month. If we want to give people a last minute reminder we can publish a day or two earlier or later, but it would be nice to stick to the 1st of each month. Information or a link to information would be appreciated at least a day or two in advance. When information is not on another site the Iris Encyclopedia has been a fall back site to put something out quickly.

Another part of N&N history is that it took nine months to get it working. I struggled but could not create a proper header that would identify it when it appeared in e-mails. I turned to other irisarians who had used Constant Contact and they could not get the format in place either. Finally, I found Wayne Messer. He was able to solve the problem, and knowing the terrific job he was doing on Region 21's website, I asked him if he would be co-editor. He agreed and we now have N&N.

Constant Contact has enormous potential. We have been adding features such as the Archives and in the future expect to do surveys and polls. Each feature requires learning more software.

Evaluating N&N: N&N goes to 2000+ AIS e-mails. It would seem that is half our membership but when one remembers there may be only one e-mail address for dual members; it is likely that we are really reaching a high percentage of members. Most nonprofit organizations see about 20% of the newsletters viewed by their subscribers. We have averaged around 60%. I have heard many good comments and only 3 e-mail addresses have opted out. (I know that two of these were people who had two addresses and only wanted it on one). I think I can say unconditionally that N&N is a success.

Iris Encyclopedia

A detailed report on the Encyclopedia was included in last month's N&N. In summary, the Encyclopedia has been phenomenally successful. Since the transfer to the new more powerful server we average over 500,000 views each month, and that is in a slack time period. It is expected that we will see over 6 million views next year and perhaps as many as 10 million. The Encyclopedia now contains almost every cultivar, except E thru Z of the 1939 checklist, and by the time of the Board meeting it will be thru G.

100th Anniversary

Donations continue for the 100th Anniversary celebration. Images from older irisarians are being sought and received. Discussion of a commemorative medal and location.

Thoughts to consider; When having that glass of wine with other board members here are some ideas that work for other organizations that we are not doing;

1. Levels of membership; Gold, silver, platinum
2. Special Publications
3. Boutiques of commissioned items, paintings, statues, tee shirts
4. Webinars
5. International symposia
6. Virtual flower shows
7. Levels of judges
8. Regional cultural advice
9. Mentors
10. Tours
11. Consulting experts
12. Garden awards for gardens
13. Inter society functions, cooperative ventures
14. Community outreach
15. Internet auctions
16. Trading posts
17. Expeditions
18. U-tube
19. Apps
20. Online continuing education.