Information Sheets
Attracting New Dancers

Aim

The aim of this Information Sheet is to provide ideas on how to attract new dancers through the traditional means of inviting friends and demo dancing. A list of other publications is provided at the end for those who wish to explore the subject further. For additional information on Marketing and Promotion check the Canadian Square & Round Dance Society web site at http://www.squaredance.ca look for 'Publicity / Public Relations' in the left frame. Attracting Through Friends.

Since the very first surveys were done back in the 1960s, the number one way of attracting new dancers to square and round dancing has been through friends. It is how about 80% of new dancers become introduced to the movement. It still is the best and by far the cheapest method. There is nothing like an enthusiastic dancer to sell the movement.

Why do we dance? There are many answers and each one of us has our own main reason. You know your friends best and what would be a reason for them to try dancing. Here are the most frequent reasons given:

1. Exercise. Dancing is good exercise. Traditionally we have used a value of 4 to 6 kilometres for a night of dancing. If you dance for two hours, you know you have been exercising. Square and round dancing are the no stress, no sweat, and no strain way of getting exercise - and in an excellent social setting as well. Like walking, dancing burns almost 80% of the calories of running for the same time period. Furthermore, walking, running, jogging, square dancing, round dancing, clog dancing, or line dancing, a kilometre of movement takes the same amount of energy. And dancers think that dancing is a great deal more fun than other methods.

2. Fun. Dancing is fun. When most people first start to dance, it takes an hour to get the grins off their face. Why is it fun? It is probably the first time in years that they have had to learn completely new things. When they step on the floor for the first time, they all start fresh and learn the calls, cues, or steps to dance. For most adults whose life is routine, it provides the only chance to use their basic brainpower.

3. Relaxing. You can't carry your troubles to the dance floor. You need total concentration to follow the calls, cues. or steps. It teaches you to accept mistakes and failures, and it shows you that every other dancer, no matter how good they are or how long they have been dancing, makes mistakes. You learn to laugh at your mistakes. And it is surprising how life's cares and tribulations seem to sort themselves out after a good night of dancing.

4. Social. Dancing is a social activity. Whether you dance in a square with seven others, or in a circle with your partner, or in a line, there are others with you. In dancing you make new friends, and don't be surprised if your friends grow by a factor of three. Party nights, pot luck suppers, cottage parties, conventions, jamborees, tours, and so on, are all part of the dance movement. All in all, it is one of the best ways to meet new people, because the dance formations make you interface with new people, and the break between dances is a natural lead-in to conversation.

Be positive when you invite your friends. The best way is to pick them up, take them to the dance, and dance with them. Make sure you introduce them to your caller, cuer, or leader. Introduce them as well to other dancers who are there. Make them feel welcome. Set the tone. If you can't take them, make sure you give them an invitation including the date, time, place, and a map on how to get there. Tell your caller, cuer, or leader to expect them.

Demo Dancing
Demo dancing has been the number two way of attracting new dancers. One problem with our demo dancing is we forget why we are doing the demo. We are there to attract new dancers, not show the public how brilliant we are, or what level we dance at, or how nicely we dress. We are not putting on a performance. We are there to bring in the public and get them dancing. Callers, cuers, and leaders especially have to guard against trying to show off. The KISS (Keep It Simple Stupid) principle should be the norm.

Connections
In Club and Association publications consider the addition of a Column to encourage singles to find partners for dancing. The column might be called: DANCERS LOOKING FOR A PARTNER

Bookmarks
Les Greenwood has suggested clubs/callers/leaders make up bookmarks (5 to a page), and all of their local libraries might be happy to hand them out to their customers. They laminated some of them at a cost of approximately 25 cents each, but for the library they did not do laminating. They could be in full colour with a suitable dance graphic and message, caller/leader's picture, and the event they were advertising. The non laminated bookmarks are reasonable to produce.

Brochures
When developing and designing a brochure to promote the activity and club to new dancers consider using 8 ½ x 14 " paper of heavier material. This size accommodates 4 columns or panels in width and folds for easy insertion in an envelope. The 4th column or panel can form a tear-off portion - one side a pre-addressed format (to the Club) with the reverse side including responses to questions or indicating interest in square dancing; round dancing, etc; their address and phone information; where they received the brochure.

Other Publicity Promotion Suggestions

l. Club or caller could set up “Fri/Sat evenings” basically one night stands. Perhaps called "a fun western night" or something. Write local groups (church/parents without partners/ firefighters/police/photography clubs/badminton group/etc. etc.) and if they want to have a “Supper” (spaghetti/corn roast/bake sale etc) as a get-together for their group or a fund raiser. The Club/caller can offer to be the entertainment, but be sure that you tell them that you want them to participate and have fun too. This really works well. Sometimes it takes 2-3 years of repeat affairs but eventually you get some new dancers.
2. Start classes early in the evening, especially if there is more than one Club in the area. Have one that dances 7-9 or 7:30-9:30. How about a “Family” square dance club which would be maybe even only one hour or an hour and a half. This is plenty long enough if there are young people dancing. (Maybe 8-19 years old and up). Also a “Teen club” once or twice a month; perhaps a Sun. afternoon would get some interest for later on.

3. Contact the local Univ. or College about doing a Western party night on a Sat. Also a possibility in connection with the end of Frosh Week. Let them plan it, and if there is alcohol involved, keep them dancing with no breaks (they won't get drunk this way).

4. Set up booths at fairs/farmers markets etc., but always try to have videos so that it holds their attention. Have a free prize draw of 10 free lessons (First prize), 5 free lessons (Second Prize), 2 free lessons (Third Prize) so you can get some names and addresses to send follow-up invitations. You could also have other prizes not related to square dancing, although you might need a permit to sell tickets.

5. Have Club members buy a ticket for one night of dancing to your club's new class, and since they have put out $$$, they will work harder to bring somebody new to class. Example; if someone asked you to go to a free dance night you might try to weasel out of it , but if your friends told you that they had bought tickets for an evening of dancing you would probably not want to hurt their feelings and have them lose their money by not going. You would probably go even if under duress! Believe me, that REALLY works.

It is really important that we let service clubs and small organizations know that we are available for an evening for them to be introduced to square dancing (plus just dancing to other kinds of music if they want that). We have been so busy for years as callers, just calling for square dance clubs that most of us don't do the one night stands any more, and that's where we generate interest in the activity. Otherwise, where are they going to be exposed to it? If doesn't happen at wedding dances, or "Stag and Doe" parties, or family picnics any more, square dancing will become a lost activity.

Disclaimer - Information Sheets

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