

Membership Retention Program

Gold Wing Road Riders Association

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Background

Growth of the Gold Wing Road Riders Association (GWRRA) is one of GWRRA's primary objectives. While membership recruitment is important in contributing to a positive growth rate, retention of existing members is equally important and if not given adequate emphasis at all levels of the Association, can significantly counteract an otherwise strong recruitment program resulting in a near zero or even negative growth rate.

Membership Recruitment processes are highly visible and relatively well known throughout the Association. GWRRA recruiters attend major GWRRA events, other motorcycle oriented events and industry trade shows offering GWRRA membership information and application encouragement and assistance. The Find-A-Friend, membership renewal and other major award programs that reward current members for recruiting new members are well known and important tools in the recruiting process. Every issue of the Wing World Magazine contains a membership application and renewal form that members can copy and offer to friends and acquaintances.

The membership retention process, on the other hand, has not been as well defined and promoted. The purpose of this paper is to define a process for membership retention that, when applied at the chapter and district levels of GWRRA, can lead to an improvement in the overall growth rate of the Association through a reduction in the numbers of members lost to non renewal of expired memberships.

Membership Cycle

Membership retention is the natural completion of the membership recruitment process. Recruitment and retention are the beginning and end of the membership cycle. In between recruitment and retention is the period where the new member's expectations are either fulfilled, resulting in a satisfied and enthusiastic member, or are left unfulfilled resulting in a disillusioned member who is not likely to renew his or her membership when it expires.

While all GWRRA members are encouraged to participate in the recruitment process and should be active participants in the activities of their local chapter helping to welcome the new members, it is ultimately the responsibility of the Chapter Director to make sure that the new members are firmly integrated into the activities of the chapter and that the new members do not "fall through a crack".

Cause and Effect

The amount of effort needed to achieve successful membership retention is to a large degree inversely proportional to the quantity and quality of effort expended on the first two parts of the membership cycle, the recruitment and the membership period following recruitment. The stronger the first and second phases of the cycle are, the easier the third phase becomes. Conversely, a strong recruitment phase with a weak membership phase results in a retention phase that could be near impossible to accomplish successfully.

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Introduction

This paper will address all aspects of the membership cycle to the extent that they have an impact on the retention process. The tools and techniques presented below are designed to strengthen those aspects of the recruitment and membership phases that will reduce and simplify the retention process. Also outlined below, are the roles of GWRRA officers and staff in the three phases of the membership cycle.

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The Recruitment Phase

The Tale

Most new members join GWRRA as the result of a positive introduction by an enthusiastic member, GWRRA officer or GWRRA recruiter. They are told about all of the great benefits that the Association has to offer its members not the least of which, is a wonderful family of friends that share a common interest.

The Hook

In many cases the prospective member is invited to visit the local GWRRA chapter at one of their breakfast or dinner gatherings, join them on an outing with a group of GWRRA members or participate in some other activity. If the recruiter has done their job well, the prospective member is convinced that they have much to gain by joining GWRRA.

Chapter Director Responsibilities

Once the membership application has been processed and the new member added to the GWRRA membership roster, the work of Member Retention begins. Contact and follow up early during the new membership are vital to the long term retention of the new member.

The first responsibility for follow up lies with the leadership of the new member's local chapter. This usually means the Chapter Director. In larger chapters, the Chapter Director may appoint a Membership Coordinator or assign the membership coordination duties to an Assistant Chapter Director or Couple of the Year.

Effective follow up is dependant on two key elements. First, knowing that a new member has been added to the Association in the chapter's area and second, personal contact with the new member. Although new members are usually introduced to the chapter before their names appear on the Area Run List (membership list), it is not uncommon that some new members may not be noticed unless the Area Run List is reviewed monthly.

As soon as the Area Run List arrives each month, the Chapter Director should forward it to the chapter's Membership Coordinator or other officer or staff person assigned the duties of membership coordination. Many Chapter Directors instead retain this report for their personal use. This is not recommended.

Since the Area Run List is now distributed as an electronic file, making a copy for those within the chapter that have a GWRRA chapter business need for the data is easier to do than it ever was in the past.

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Chapter Membership Coordinator Responsibilities

The work of the Chapter Membership Coordinator begins as soon as he or she knows that a new member has been added to the Association in the chapter's area. Contact with the new member should be made to welcome the new member into the Association and to make sure that any questions that the new member has are answered. This initial contact is most effective if done by the Chapter Director. The Chapter Membership Coordinator should facilitate this contact by making sure that the Chapter Director has all of the information needed to make the contact.

While a personal face to face contact with the new member is recommended for the initial contact, the contact can also be made either by telephone or letter depending on what the Chapter Director or Chapter Membership Coordinator is more comfortable with. Attached is an example of a letter (Attachment #1) that could be used to make the initial welcome contact with a new member.

If the initial contact is in person or by telephone, the Chapter Director or Chapter Membership Coordinator should be sure to cover the essence of what is in the sample letter below in addition to any other information about the chapter and its activities.

Regardless of the method used, the contact with the new member should be made as soon as it is known that the potential member has become a new member, typically within ten days. At the very least, if the initial contact has not been made sooner, then it should be made when the name first appears on the monthly Area Run List.

One of the most important tools that the Membership Coordinator has at his or her disposal for knowing that new members have been added and for making sure that all new members have been contacted and none missed is the Area Run List. New members are added to the membership database at the GWRRA Home Office in Phoenix as soon as their membership application is processed and are included in the next GWRRA Area Run List. All new members are indicated on the report with a single asterisk in the left most column with the header "NEW".

The single asterisk indicates that the member's name is appearing on the Area Run List for the first time. New members are not marked with asterisks past the first month on the Area Run List. The asterisks are an alert to flag the new members to the attention of the Chapter Director and/or Membership Coordinator so that they can tell at a glance which members should receive immediate attention.

District Director Responsibilities

The Area Run List is generated monthly at the GWRRA offices in Phoenix and distributed by eMail directly to the Region Directors. The Region Membership Coordinator should break the file down to the district level in individual files and send each District Director their file.

District Directors, as soon as they receive the Area Run List each month, should forward the file to their District Membership Coordinator for processing, analysis and feedback.

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District Membership Coordinator Responsibilities

The District Membership Coordinator should review the new Area Run List each month, as soon as it is received from the District Director. He/she should note, by chapters, the new members that have been added during the past month.

He/she should break the file down into individual files to the chapter level and send each Chapter Director their portion of the list with new, expired and soon to expire members identified¹. Timely distribution of this data is important for effective member contact at the chapter level. Printing and distribution by mail is also an option for chapters that are not on line. For many districts however, printing the entire report is usually not practical due to the width of the spreadsheet format that is used and the number of pages involved.

While the initial welcoming of new members should be done at the chapter level no later than the first month the new member appears on the Area Run List, a welcoming follow up contact with the new member from the district level should be done during the new member's second month. This contact will help to reinforce the new member's sense of family with all of GWRRA and to insure that the new member has been contacted should the initial contact from the chapter level fail for some reason.

For this contact, a letter is recommended since a telephone call will usually result in long distance charges. The letter should complement the contact made at the chapter level. A sample letter is included below as Attachment #2.

¹ New Member: "*" in the NEW column, Expired Member: "E" in the ACTIVE column, Soon to Expire Member: Date in the TERMDATE column at the end of the current month or at the end of the next month.

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The Happy Chapter

The second part of the membership cycle is the period following the recruitment phase. This is the period when the new member's expectations are either fulfilled, resulting in a satisfied and hopefully enthusiastic member, or are left unfulfilled resulting in a disillusioned member who is not likely to renew his or her membership when it expires.

Happy Chapters are the building blocks to a successful GWRRA. Let's address some statistics as they relate to the membership cycle and as indicators of whether or not the chapter is a Happy Chapter.

Numbers are perceived as indicators of many things including our bargaining power for member benefit packages. These benefits cover the spectrum from the dealer discount programs and insurance discount programs to the kind of deal we can negotiate for a rally site, based on the projected number of members attending.

Attendance numbers are perceived as a measure of support or participation in events or programs. The success of a chapter's fund raiser or vendor support for an event are predicated on numbers. A downward trend in numbers, can indicate unhappy members and ineffective officers, while an upward trend in numbers usually indicates happy members and effective officers and therefore Happy Chapters.

There will be spikes and dips, in the total number of members but a gradual growth over any realistic time span is considered a healthy situation. Conversely, a decline in numbers over a realistic time span is considered reason for concern. A couple of examples will serve to illustrate this point.

The members in your chapter are perfectly happy. You are enjoying each other so much that you feel you need no recruiting effort. Natural attrition, which you have no real control over, will however reduce the membership by about 5% per year. Natural attrition is the result of health, economics, broken friendships, job transfers, and a variety of other reasons that cause members to leave a chapter. The chapter has started to decline, yet we are still having fun and think we are doing everything right!

We can hope that this decline will be offset by walk in recruits, but the number of such new members is very small, usually less than 2%, so we are still on the decline. Even so, we are still having FUN!

History and experience show us that this fun and happiness is short lived. We are going to get bored doing the same things over and over with the same people. The chapter will eventually wither and die.

A positive recruiting program will bring adequate numbers of new members with new ideas into the chapter to revitalize our activities, bring our decline to an end and cause our Chapter, District, Region and the Association to grow and prosper into the future. This increase in membership will assist the Association in acquiring more and better benefits for all members. We owe it to our friends to get them involved in our FUN Association!

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We just looked at a nearly perfect chapter, now let's look at a typical, real world chapter, similar to most of ours. This will be the same basic chapter down to the point where the expiration rate is a hypothetical 9%-12%. For this discussion, we will assign a natural attrition level of 3% and an overall expiration level of 10%.

This means we have 7% of our expirations in a category that WE CAN DO SOMETHING ABOUT! This 7% will often be members that are unhappy about what is being done or the way it is being done, or they are hitch hikers (those that attend and participate without paying membership fees).

Often times, these hitch hikers will con their way into discounts meant for members only. Efforts to retain these members are generally successful if pursued energetically.

Successful Membership Retention does not happen without some effort. Most Chapter Directors do not find time to handle it all without some help. A supportive staff member can handle a lot of the reminders, but some members need the attention and communication from the CD or ACD to get the desired response.

Sometimes the DD or RD needs to make the contact. If that is what it takes, do it. Many people like to be approached by a person of authority, but it is best to start with a person they are familiar with.

This contact is best handled, face to face, but phone calls are a good option. Contact by the CD is normally the answer to most retention problems. It gives the member a chance to air complaints or ideas that they may have and at the same time it lets them know that the Director is concerned about them.

Remember, we owe it to our GWRRA friends and other friends to get them involved in GWRRA. The additional members will make the GWRRA experience better for all of us.

Each district and in turn each chapter must establish a program that assures that each new member is made to feel welcome even if they do not attend the first few meetings after becoming a member. This should include things like a welcome phone call, welcome letter, recent newsletter copies, current newsletters and being put on the mailing list, an introduction at their first meeting and having chapter greeters that take them under their wings and make them feel welcome and answer the usual questions. This process requires finding out immediately when a potential member has been signed. This requires the assistance of the recruiting person or contact.

We must never forget that our most effective recruitment and retention person is a HAPPY CHAPTER member. If the members are happy, they will talk about it to their friends and co-workers and the end result will be that a friend comes to the next meeting or ride and they will join in the FUN.

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The Retention Phase

The Ideal Situation

In the perfect world, all new members are always 100% satisfied with their GWRRA experience. They never fail to renew their memberships and therefore never become expired members and there is no need for a membership retention function.

Reality

In the real world, not every member that is recruited is going to renew his or her membership without some incentive. Hopefully that incentive is the positive experience that they have been having with their GWRRA friends and they renew their membership on their own initiative.

In some cases however, it may take a little push for that renewal to occur. This push begins at the chapter level with the Chapter Membership Coordinator.

Chapter Membership Coordinator Responsibilities

Every month, the Area Run List is sent out from the GWRRA offices in Phoenix to the Region Directors. The file contains a snapshot of the GWRRA membership database as of the run date, usually the fifth of the month. New members that have been added during the past month are marked and memberships that have expired at the end of the previous month are also marked. The distribution process for this list should result in the Chapter Membership Coordinator receiving data for his or her chapter within a week to 10 days.

As the Chapter Membership Coordinator reviews this data, he or she should be looking for memberships that have expired and memberships that will expire during either the current month or the following month. By sorting the file on the TERMDATE and LNAME columns as the first and second sort keys, the list is automatically placed in order by expiration date and last name and members that need to renew are readily identified. These members should be contacted with a reminder that their membership has or is about to expire and to encourage them to renew.

This reminder can be accomplished with either a telephone call or a letter depending on what the Chapter Membership Coordinator is more comfortable with. Attached is an example of a letter (Attachment #3) that could be used to make the renewal reminder contact with the about to expire member.

If the initial contact is by telephone, the Chapter Membership Coordinator should be sure to cover the essence of what is in the sample letter below. Regardless of the method used, the renewal reminder contact should be made a month or two before the actual expiration date.

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District Membership Coordinator Responsibilities

As soon as the District Membership Coordinator receives the Area Run List file from the District Director, he/she should break the file down into individual files to the chapter level and send each Chapter Director their portion of the list with new, expired and soon to expire members identified². Timely distribution of this data is important for effective member contact at the chapter level. Printing and distribution by mail is also an option for chapters that are not on line. For many districts however, printing the entire report is usually not practical due to the width of the spreadsheet format that is used and the number of pages involved.

He/she should also review the new Area Run List each month, noting by chapters, members that have expired in the past month and that will expire in the current month and the next month. By sorting the file on the TERMDATE, CHAPT and LNAME columns as the first, second and third sort keys, the list is automatically placed in order by expiration date, chapter and last name and members that need to renew are readily identified.

If a member has been expired for two months or more (see the date in the TERMDATE column) a follow up with that member from the District level with encouragement to renew their membership should be made.

Since this contact is to be made with a member who may have made a conscious decision not to renew his or her membership, it is important that the approach be handled as delicately as possible. If the member's experience with GWRRA and or their home chapter was not as positive as they had expected, they may not be receptive to encouragement to renew.

If the member has made the decision not to renew, it is often possible that they have made their decision without complete information about their options or they have a problem with GWRRA that in their estimation may not be solvable.

The District Membership Coordinator should make his or her best effort to learn the member's reason for not renewing their membership and to determine if there is anything that can be done to change the member's mind by providing additional information and answering questions. The member may also have reasons for not renewing that need to be fed back to the District Director for action.

Contact with the expired member can be either by telephone or by letter. If a letter is used, it can be followed up on with a telephone call if district resources permit. A sample letter for member contact at this stage is attached below as Attachment #4.

The reasons that members have for not renewing their memberships are important items of information. The District Membership Coordinator should tabulate these reasons and forward them to the District Director and the Region Membership Coordinator. In some cases, it may be possible to make corrections that will help to prevent loss of members in the future.

² New Member: "*" in the NEW column, Expired Member: "E" in the ACTIVE column, Soon to Expire Member: TERMDATE at the end of the current month or at the end of the next month.

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The District Membership Coordinator should also compare the new Area Run List to the previous Area Run List to determine the degree of success that each Chapter Director is having with membership renewals. By comparing the expired members from the previous month with the current Area Run List, it can be quickly determined if the expired members renewed their membership or not.

Performing such an analysis each month will often show trends where follow-up is most needed. Feeding the results of this analysis back to the District Director will provide the Director with valuable information that will be helpful in determining where Member Retention efforts are needed most.

Region Membership Coordinator Responsibilities

The Area Run List is generated monthly at the GWRRA offices in Phoenix and distributed by eMail directly to the Region Directors. The file contains a snapshot of the GWRRA membership database as of the run date, usually the fifth of the month. The Region Director, as soon as he/she receives the region's file, should forward the file to the Region Membership Coordinator (RMC) for processing.

The RMC should break the file down to the district level in individual district files. Following this he/she should review the individual files for total number of members, number of expired members, number of unassigned members and number of members that will expire at the end of the current month. Comparisons should be made to the previous month's file so that upward and downward trends can be determined.

The results of this analysis for each district should be reported to the District Director in a message accompanying the district's Area Run List file. Strengths and weaknesses should be emphasized for attention at both the district and chapter levels. The compiled analysis for the region should also be reported to the Region Director for his/her information and/or follow-up.

The Region Membership Coordinator should facilitate and support the District Directors and District Membership Coordinators to the maximum extent possible with the performance of their duties regarding Membership Retention.

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Sample New Member Welcome Letter - Chapter Level Attachment #1

Return Address
Return Address
Date

New Member's Name
Home Address
City, State Zip

Dear (new member's name),

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome you as a member of the Gold Wing Road Riders Association. We have added your name to our Phone Tree List and the Chapter Phone Tree Coordinator will be contacting you soon with information on our Gatherings and other activities.

We trust that your membership in the Gold Wing Road Riders Association will be both a pleasant and rewarding experience for you. Many others have found that their membership in GWRRA has opened new doors of friendship for them and many new opportunities for enjoying the sport of motorcycling.

I and the other Volunteer Leaders and Staff Members of GWRRA look forward to your comments and suggestions on what we can do to help make the time that you spend with your GWRRA family even more rewarding for you. Please feel free to contact any of us with your questions, concerns and suggestions. We will do our absolute best to help you achieve the maximum return on your investment in GWRRA as we possibly can.

We are looking forward to seeing you soon.

Sincerely Yours,

Chapter Director or Staff Member
(Title)

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Sample New Member Welcome Letter - District Level

Attachment #2

Return Address
Return Address
Date

New Member's Name
Home Address
City, State Zip

Dear (new member's name),

Please allow me to welcome you as a member of the Gold Wing Road Riders Association. By now you should have been contacted by someone from Chapter (district-chapter) and probably are already involved in activities with your fellow chapter members.

This letter is a follow up to be sure that your experience with GWRRA so far has been rewarding and to let you know that you can feel free to contact me at any time if you have any questions or concerns.

If this is true and all is well then I would like to extend my best wishes for a happy and enjoyable relationship with GWRRA. However, if you have not been contacted yet by someone from your chapter, please call me immediately so that I can help correct any problems that may exist and help you to begin enjoying the benefits of being a member of GWRRA.

Sincerely Yours,

District Dir or Staff Member
(Title)
(Telephone Number)

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Sample Membership Renewal Reminder Letter - Chapter Level Attachment #3

Return Address
Return Address
Date

New Member's Name
Home Address
City, State Zip

Dear (new member's name),

According to our records, your membership in the Gold Wing Road Riders Association will expire soon. If you have not yet sent in your renewal, we would like to extend to you a friendly reminder and invitation to do so. We want to be sure that you don't miss out on any of the activities that we have planned for the coming months and we don't want to lose you as a friend and GWRRA member!

Besides the opportunities that exist in your GWRRA chapter for new and lasting friendships with people just like you that enjoy motorcycling, other benefits such as your subscription to Wing World and to the Gold Book will continue when you renew your membership. Many members have found that these two membership benefits alone are more than worth the modest cost of membership renewal.

You won't want to miss any of the day rides, tours, dinner rides and rallies that the members in your area will be part of in the coming months. You also won't want to miss any of the fun at your monthly Chapter Gatherings and other meetings.

Renewing your membership is easy. Simply complete an Application/Renewal form and attach your check or money order or complete the credit card authorization section on the form and send it to the address on the form. Application/Renewal forms are available from your Chapter or can be found in every issue of Wing World. Renewal can also be accomplished over the telephone by calling 1-800-843-9460, GWRRA Membership Services.

Renewing early will assure that there is no lapse in your membership or in the delivery of your Wing World magazine.

If you have any questions about renewing your membership or questions about your Chapter or GWRRA that I can answer, please feel free to contact me and I will be more than happy to help you in any way that I can.

We are looking forward to seeing you soon and to continuing our friendship with you long into the future.

Sincerely Yours,

Chapter Membership Coordinator

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Sample Membership Expired Follow Up Letter - District Level

Attachment #4

Return Address
Return Address
Date

New Member's Name
Home Address
City, State Zip

Dear (new member's name),

According to our records, you have not yet renewed your membership in the Gold Wing Road Riders Association. If you have sent in your renewal then I would like to thank you for your decision to renew and extend to you my congratulations for the investment that you have made in your future with our Association. We will no doubt receive confirmation of your renewal soon.

If however, you have not yet renewed your membership, I am sure that there is a very good reason for your not having done so.

Perhaps your expiration date just sneaked up on you and you did not realize that time had passed so quickly. If this is the case, don't let another day pass without taking action. Complete an Application/Renewal form and attach your check or money order or complete the credit card authorization section on the form and send it to the address on the form or call 1-800-843-9460, GWRRA Membership Services.

Maybe you don't have your Gold Wing or Valkyrie any longer. Not owning a Gold Wing or Valkyrie does not prevent you from continuing your membership in GWRRA. You can convert your membership to an Associate Membership and continue to participate in most of the activities that you have enjoyed in the past as well as continue to receive the Wing World magazine.

If there is some other reason why you have not renewed your membership, I would like to hear about it. Perhaps you have had an experience that has left you dissatisfied with the Association. In most cases, such issues can usually be resolved in a satisfactory manner.

Please take a few minutes to write me a note describing your concern or call me at the telephone number listed below. I would like to discuss your concern with you and try to help reach a solution that is satisfactory to you so that you can feel comfortable about renewing your membership.

We are looking forward to seeing you soon and to continuing our friendship with you long into the future.

Sincerely Yours,

District Membership Coordinator
(Telephone Number)