
To The Membership Chair: How To Sell Memberships

by Baxter Williams, Member, ARS Marketing & Membership Committee

STEP 1: BE COMMITTED TO GROWTH

As Chairperson of your local society Membership Committee, your primary job is to CAUSE MEMBERSHIP GROWTH. Your approach should be to use every avenue available to contact the public so they can learn of the advantages of society membership. This is just a basic sales approach: find the need, then show how your product meets that need. You, and your society officers, must wish the society to grow. Don't let any argument distract you from your mandate to MAKE THE MEMBERSHIP GROW IN NUMBERS.

Are there impediments to growth? – Lengthy business meetings conducted at membership meetings are a huge turnoff. Members attend your meetings to learn about the rose and to socialize with Rose Friends. Inadequate seating, meetings that don't start/end on time, newsletters that are late, no technical depth in presentations/articles – these are all impediments to growth. Eliminate them!! That is what society officers are supposed to do.

Make every facet of your society conducive to membership growth and stability. Pursue every approach to gaining public attention to the society and its benefits. Put meeting notices in the newspapers. Be a regular guest on local garden-oriented radio shows. Give your name and phone number to your local library. Leave membership application forms at all large nurseries, after you sign up the proprietors! Exchange your officer/CR list with other local flower clubs and societies. Make “(name) Rose Society Member” yard signs for your members to install in their front yards. Make sure the superintendent of the city park knows how to put people in touch with your society. The biggest barrier to outsiders is not knowing how to find you.

STEP 2: KNOW YOUR MARKET

Who are the likeliest to become members? Table A compares characteristics of those who might be approached. Some will find you, if you've left adequate “trails” to your doorstep; but the society will experience its most profound growth when you actively pursue the un-enrolled.

Table A. The Market

*** Local Rose Society**

- Beginners/Experienced
- Individuals/Couples/Families
- Non-member/Renewal
- ARS Member-only
- Newly-married; New House
- Just Arrived from Out-of-Town/Out-of-State

*** American Rose Society**

- Beginners/Experienced
- Individuals/Couples/Families
- Non-member/Renewal
- No Nearby Rose Society

STEP 3: KNOW THE NEEDS

The NEEDS of prospective members (and current members, too) are basically:

- Problem Solving
- Horticulture Knowledge
- Variety Source Location
- Rose Care Products Source Location
- Society Needs

Your job: show how your society can fill those needs.

STEP 4: KNOW YOUR PRODUCT

Your PRODUCT is your SOCIETY. It is made up of many features that will benefit the members, some of which are shown in Table B. Notice that, on district and national levels, the American Rose Society offers the same type of product features to its members, but not identical in content to local products.

Table B. Product & Product Features

*** Local Rose Society**

- Newsletter
- Brochures
- Consulting Rosarians
- Local Lending Library
- Gift Memberships
- Garden Tours and Demonstrations
- Monthly Programs
- Annual/Monthly Shows/Exhibitions
- Local Horticultural Practices
- Connections to Local Nurseries

*** American Rose Society**

- *American Rose magazine & the American Rose Annual*
- *The Handbook for Selecting Roses*
- Reciprocal Garden Program – ARS membership includes FREE or reduced admission to over 200 botanical gardens nationwide.
- FREE e-access to ARS specialty bulletins
- Member Benefits Program – offering discounts to ARS members from participating Nurseries and companies
- Outstanding website with **Members Only** section www.ars.org
- Consulting Rosarians, Rose Show Judges
- Gift Membership rates
- American Rose Center (ARC) in Shreveport, LA
- National/District Conventions/Conferences
- Nationwide Practices/ARC Trials and Research
- New Product Evaluation Committee
- Educational Literature/Bookstore

STEP 5: TOOLS

Since most society memberships are the result of one-on-one encounters, it makes a lot of sense to equip yourself with in-hand TOOLS that will enhance success. Table C lists several items that can be used to advantage. In each encounter, your chance of gaining a member will be more likely if you have something to give or at least show to the prospective member. Brochures and application forms should **always** include an address and phone number for future contact.

Table C. Tools

*** Local Rose Society**

- | | |
|-------------------|----------------------|
| --- Brochure(s) | --- Application Form |
| --- Pen or Pencil | --- Local Newsletter |

*** American Rose Society**

- | | |
|-------------------|----------------------|
| --- Brochure(s) | --- Application Form |
| --- Pen or Pencil | |
- *American Rose/Handbook for Selecting Roses*

Back issues of American Rose, the Annual and the Handbook are available for your membership promotions from ARS Headquarters at no charge.

STEP 6: DEVELOP THE TECHNIQUE

Good salespersons always have an idea of how their “sales pitch” will be delivered before it happens – they then guide the conversation so that it often results in a sale. They will, at first, write down the basic points they feel will lead to a sale, then commit them to memory. They practice their pitch, maybe try it out on a friend, and have in mind ways to bring a conversation back to the subject, if it strays.

Sound complicated? It’s not. Here’s a typical approach to a casual visitor to your rose show/exhibition or to your booth at the annual lawn and garden show:

You: *Hi there! Do you have some roses in your yard?*

Visitor: *I have a few.*

You: *Me, too. Do you have, say, a hundred?*

Visitor: *Oh, no! Only six!*

You: *Here’s a brochure that might be of help. It gives the basics of good rose care, a list of some varieties that grow well here, and a list of consultants that you can call for free advice.*

Visitor: *Thank you.*

You: *Our club, The (name) Rose Society, has (number) families scattered all over town. We teach people how to grow good roses. We meet on the (2nd Thursday) at (time) in the evening so that working people can attend. We have good attendance because we don’t conduct business when we meet!*

Visitor: *I like that!*

You: *There’s a monthly newsletter included in the membership fee that tells what to do now so that, a month from now, you’ll have good roses. (Show a copy of the newsletter, but DON’T give it away. It is a “product feature”; they can have one when they pay to join.) There is a (number) – yard garden tour in (month) **FOR ROSE SOCIETY MEMBERS ONLY** which is worth more than the (\$) dollar membership fee; it allows you to see what grows well locally, in case you’d like to try some of them in your own yard. And there are discounts in some local nurseries, so you can actually get your (\$) dollars back. It “pays” you to join our club. If you’ll join today, we’ll give you back issues of the newsletter, a membership card, and you’ll get the*

(next month) issue which goes into the Post Office on Monday. (At this point, they'll either join, or thank you and walk away. You have given them a 1-minute presentation of the essentials of the society.)

Visitor: *Is it (\$) dollars for each of us?*

You: *No, it's for the entire family through December 31st. But let me suggest, also, that this is a very nice, yet inexpensive, gift for Mom or for a friend; and we send a Gift Notice to say that you are the donor. Step over here to my "office" (any flat spot)!*

STEP 7: PRACTICE THE TECHNIQUE

Go over the "pitch" until you don't have to use notes. Preparation makes a big difference in how you are perceived by the listener. If you hesitate, a visitor might think that you don't know much about roses, either. Practice! Practice! Practice.

STEP 8: DON'T STOP

Be ready to "sell" a membership anywhere you go, whether in the mall, at the show, at the office, in the checkout line at the supermarket, etc., etc. The "needy" (for rose info) are all around us. As a matter of fact, while one new member is filling out a membership form, turn around and start talking to someone else! When you stop, or sit down, or, as my father use to say, "put you hands in your pockets," the process is curtailed. Don't stop. Keep on signing 'em up until the newsletter editor is forced to increase the newsletter paper supplies!
