

# GUIDE TO BEST PRACTICE FOR EXPORT CLUBS

## **CONTENTS**

1. INTRODUCTION
2. DECIDING TO JOIN AN EXPORT CLUB
3. STANDARDS
4. ATTRACTING & RETAINING NEW MEMBERS
5. PROGRAMME IDEAS
6. EXAMPLES OF BEST PRACTICE
7. FINANCING
8. LOCAL CO-OPERATION & PARTNERSHIPS
9. THE ROLE OF SECG AND HOW IT CAN HELP
10. MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
11. EXECUTIVE CO-ORDINATOR

Last Updated  
Friday, 28 May 2004

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

It is hard to tie down when the first Export Club was set-up in Scotland, however, in 1988 the first official UK Export Club's newsletter listed 65 Clubs in the UK. This included three Scottish Clubs: North of Scotland Export Club, Fife Export Club, and Scottish Thistle.

The evidence suggests North of Scotland may well have been the first Export Club in Scotland, with records showing that in 1977 they had 100 members.

Other Clubs started to appear in the 1990's. Lanarkshire Export Forum, Scottish Borders Export Club, and Tayside Export Forum, followed by Renfrewshire, Dumbartonshire, Ayrshire, Glasgow, and Highland, although not necessarily in that order. In 1998 Glasgow became the 100th Export Club in the UK, and that made a total of 12 affiliated Clubs or Forums in Scotland, including Dumfries & Galloway where a 'Virtual Export Club' had been introduced.

Export Clubs were not set-up under any strict rules and regulations. They had guidance from NECAC, the National Export Clubs Advisory Committee but, it was always left up to the local Committees to decide how their Club would operate best.

Edinburgh & Lothians developed a Business Plan, and the Scottish Borders produced a constitution, both of which were taken on board by NECAC,. These documents were used when setting up the Clubs in Ayrshire, Highland, and Glasgow..

Around 1996 the first Export Club co-ordinators, as opposed to secretaries, were introduced to take over more of the day-today running at a number of Clubs, thereby relieving the stress on the committee, many of whom were active Exporters who, quite understandable, were finding it hard to devote the time required to run the Club properly. The introduction of the co-ordinators must be considered a very successful innovation, and credit must be given to Edinburgh & Lothians which was the first Export Club in the UK to introduce a co-ordinator.

Most Export Clubs came about with encouragement and financial support from the local Chambers of Commerce, LEC and Regional Council. They were the results of successful co-operation between the private and public sectors. Initially, all Clubs had a Committee drawn mainly from the private sector, but getting Private Sector members to remain active on the committee, and the running of the Clubs has been difficult due to time constraints

At the 2003 conference in Inverness it was agreed SECG, the Scottish Export Club Group, which has always been best described as a loose association of Clubs and Forums, would benefit from the introduction of an Executive Co-ordinator, tasked to bring some order, cohesion, and co-ordination to the Clubs.

This Guide is therefore offered in the hope it will assist Club officials in the operation of their respective Clubs, and that it's suggestions and ideas will help improve the quality of meetings, increase membership, and the return of private sector involvement in the running of all Clubs.

## **2 THE DECISION TO JOIN AN EXPORT CLUB**

The most important component of an export Club is its members. Below are some ideas on how to make people aware of your club's existence and to arouse their curiosity.

- The important thing is to put yourself in the place of the person whose attention you are trying to attract. What features would stimulate your taste buds? - the speaker.. the topic.. the gathering together of like-minded International trade orientated people?
- Publicity is the key to stimulating interest. Securing publicity is an art, but it is not easy. Some regions will find it easier than others, but securing publicity is the lifeline to securing potential members initial interest.
  - First create an awareness with the local press, radio, and TV of the existence and activities of the Export Club.
  - Try to meet the editors, or broadcasters, and keep them abreast of events and local newsworthy stories.
  - Offer to be interviewed when comment on International trading topics is required.
  - Produce "member related" local interest news stories.
  - Keep press releases flowing - bearing in mind that last minute news stories might scupper efforts for publicity, so, keep the pressure on the publicity ahead of publication or radio broadcast deadlines.
  - Try to secure "live" radio time, rather than recording an interview. Recordings are often edited and the important issues might be axed.
  - Prepare a publicity leaflet and/or programme card. Ensure this is circulated widely and displayed in - local libraries, business organisations, LEC's, BG-IT, Regional Council, Chambers of Commerce.
- Once a new member has arrived at his or her first meeting, how would they expect to be greeted. Some ideas are as follows:
  - A welcoming handshake from a Committee member on arrival
  - Introduction to the Chairman, and Club members.
  - A copy of the current Club programme of events, and Club newsletter.
  - A name badge, containing full name and company.

### **3 STANDARDS**

Discussions at the annual conference concluded that if Export Clubs are to attract individuals to attend meetings regularly, and to retain members, there should be a minimum set of standards covering meetings and the operation of the Export Clubs. The following suggestions are made:

#### **ARRANGING MEETINGS**

- ◆ Stick with a 'memorable' date for meetings - e.g. 2nd Thursday of each month.
- ◆ Arrange a regular meeting programme
- ◆ Plan the content of the programme well in advance.
- ◆ Do not leave selection of speakers until the last minute. Contact speakers 3-6 months before the meeting.
- ◆ Review the programme quarterly.
- ◆ Send out calling notices, not only to members - too all businesses within your area with an interest in International trade, indicating not only the subject title and speaker's name, but a brief synopsis of the topic and why it is of relevance to Exporters.
- ◆ Develop a recognised and structured meeting agenda.
- ◆ Keep meetings running to time.
- ◆ Issue a press release about 10 days before each meeting to the local Papers, Radio & TV stations, although it is recognised that TV exposure is very difficult to achieve.

#### **VENUE**

- ◆ The venue should be comfortable, with good facilities and easy access to parking.
- ◆ Be flexible with the location in large catchment areas. This can help boost attendance.

#### **FORMAT & SUBJECT MATTER**

- ◆ Meetings should be held at a time that is considered preferred by members. Breakfast, lunch, afternoon, or evening meetings, whichever achieves the greatest attendance.
- ◆ A buffet either before or after the meeting will encourage networking and allow members to attend meetings straight after work.
- ◆ Select topical and interesting subjects of benefit to participating members.
- ◆ Maintain well presented and lively meetings.
- ◆ Encourage maximum inter-action between members.
- ◆ Create an opportunity for members to be invited to talk about their products or recent overseas visits.
- ◆ Highlight new or recent importing/exporting legislation.
- ◆ Always allow time for networking after the presentations.

## **THE COMMITTEE**

- ◆ Appoint an active Committee, comprised mainly of active Exporters. This is a key point made time and again in questionnaires.
- ◆ The number on Committee needs to allow for the fact that exporters are frequently travelling. If the quorum is 6, the Committee probably needs to be between 10-12.
- ◆ The Committee should regularly seek guidance from the members - a questionnaire - on the subjects members would like to see on the agenda, as well as the location and format of meetings.
- ◆ Publish a Club Newsletter or introduce a Web-site.
- ◆ Seek to maintain a high level of membership, replacing lost members with new and potential Exporters.
- ◆ Operate under an ethical code of practice.
- ◆ Constantly assess the quality and value of meetings.
- ◆ Generate a membership list, including a description of each members products and services.
- ◆ Secure sufficient income to ensure the continuance of the Club, through membership fees and/or sponsorship.
- ◆ Co-operate with other local and national organisations - partnerships (i.e. Chamber, IoE, LEC, Regional Council, etc.) to avoid duplication of effort and topics.

#### **4. ATTRACTING AND RETAINING MEMBERS**

From discussions it is clear that virtually every Export Club has experienced difficulties at one time or another in retaining existing members and attracting new members.

Although there is no easy solution, those clubs which experience success in creating and retaining interest are organised by innovative and enterprising Committees.

The various role of a Committee are outlined below:

##### **CHAIRMAN**

- ◆ The role of the Chairman is recognised as a figurehead appointment, with the success of meetings and attendance responding to the Chairman's lead.
- ◆ Wherever possible the Chairman should be, or has been, an active Exporter.
- ◆ The Vice-Chairman, also an active exporter, is likely to be called on frequently to step in when the Chairman is overseas on business.
- ◆ The Chairman should have clear objectives for the Club and stimulate innovative ideas.
- ◆ The Chairman should be a good 'meeter and greeter'. It is important that he/she is free to spend time with both the members and visiting speakers before and after the meeting.
- ◆ The Chairman should know his membership. By this, he should know the members personally, have a good overview of the sectors represented, types of businesses, and the exporting experiences of members.
- ◆ The Chairmen needs to be a long-term thinker.
- ◆ The Chairman should know enough of the Speaker's topic and background to ensure an interesting introduction, plus helpful questions to maintain the momentum of questions during and after the presentations.

##### **SECRETARY / CO-ORDINATOR**

The Secretary or Co-ordinator is very much the linchpin of any Club. It need not be an over-taxing position if the operational requirements are spread across a number of willing hands. Duties will include the following:

- ◆ Keeping a minute record of Committee meetings and decisions.
- ◆ Corresponding with speakers and sponsors.
- ◆ Assisting the Chairman in ensuring all organisational matters are carried out to high standards.



Last Updated  
Friday, 28 May 2004

#### **4. ATTRACTING AND RETAINING MEMBERS (Cont...)**

##### **COMMITTEE MEETINGS**

Meetings should ideally take place quarterly, and a practical suggestion is to convene prior to the main Club meeting. This will keep Committee requirements to a relative minimum.

## **5. PROGRAMME IDEAS**

Some of the topics which Export Clubs have found most valuable are listed below. Use should be made of visiting Commercial Officers from Embassies, Export Promoters, and speakers from UK Trade & Investment, SDI and BG-IT. Details can be obtained from the SECG Executive Co-ordinator.

- Market specific presentation from DTI Export Promoters.
- Presentations by country and sector experts.
- Presentations by visiting Commercial Officers
- Personal experiences of Export Club members
- Successes of local SME's.
- Communications, EDI and Internet issues for Exporters
- International Trade Fairs and exhibitions
- Use of BBC World Service and New products from Britain services.
- Question time for members panel
- Visits to local companies involved in International trading
- Visits to service providers - freight forwarders, airports, sea ports.
- Getting to know you! (Networking with other members)
- Problem areas for Exporters
- Effective use of export service providers
- Face the Bankers panel
- Developing a 'right first time' culture.
- Presentations by MEP's & MSP's.
- Customs & Excise - VAT, Tariffs, Duties, etc.
- Specific help from UK Trade & Investment Country Desks (if available)
- Getting Paid
- Invoicing in a buyer's currency, managing foreign exchange exposure.
- Legal implications by country
- Appointing agents and distributors
- Competitiveness issues in the EU
- New developments in exporting regulations
- Credit Terms
- Letters of Credit
- CE markings
- EMC regulations
- Pre-Shipment inspections and understanding procedures and requirements
- Patents and Trademarks
- Training of staff to achieve success in exporting
- Understanding documentation requirements around the world.

## 6. EXAMPLES OF BEST PRACTICE

- ◆ Consistently hold well organised, informative, and enjoyable meetings
- ◆ Make meetings more personalised. It may be useful to let speakers have a profile of Club membership a few weeks before the meeting so they can tailor their presentation to the members requirements or activities.
- ◆ Solicit views from membership at least once a year, possibly by use of a questionnaire, or by involving members in Committee discussions. This will help ensure that members' needs are being identified and are being met.
- ◆ Allow members the opportunity to speak about their exporting experiences and acquaint the other members with what their company does.
- ◆ Provide an opportunity at each meeting for a local BG-IT adviser to announce local export initiatives, including missions, exhibitions, and details of visiting Commercial Officers.
- ◆ Provide name badges at each meeting - in large type - to aid networking.
- ◆ Food before the formal meeting allows general networking and time for late arrivals: food after the meeting allows time for discussion with the speakers and networking. A combination of both works well.
- ◆ Members be invited to bring along a guest.
- ◆ Generate a rolling 3 year Business Plan.
- ◆ Develop a constitution.

**Overall, it's what format your members like most of all,  
So don't forget to regularly ask them what they want.**

## **7. FINANCING**

There are many ways in which an Export Club can be financed, some of which are shown below. However, several Clubs have demonstrated that a 'Business Plan' setting out some of the following information, and providing a clear focus of where the Club is going, will undoubtedly help the cause for financial support.

Some of the options are:

- Members subscription set at an affordable and attractive level
- Sponsorship from the 'service sector' - freight forwarders, Banks, airlines, etc.
- Sponsorship from experienced exporting companies, particularly where they are able to host meetings.
- Local Enterprise Company.
- Regional & Local Councils
- Chambers of Commerce
- Usually a combination of the above is the solution.

An outline of what the Business Plan might cover is as follows:

- ♦ **The Executive Summary**
  - The aims and objectives of the Export Club
  - The area it serves
  - The importance of the SME sector served by the Export Club
  - Membership summary
- ♦ **Key Objectives**
  - To help the education and training of Exporters
  - Provide support to and participation from SME's
  - Develop a co-ordinated and interesting meeting programme
  - Publish a members directory
  - To increase membership
- ♦ **Marketing Strategy**
  - Special events
  - Good communications with all intended parties
  - Accessibility of the business community to club activities
  - New member recruitment
- ♦ **Management and Operations**
  - Funding requirements
  - Financial statements
  - Advertising and publicity
  - Cash Flow projection

Last Updated  
Friday, 28 May 2004

**7. FINANCING (Cont...)**

The essential elements of a Business Plan are available from the SECG Executive Co-ordinator.

## **8. LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS AND CO-OPERATIONS**

Many Export Clubs enjoy excellent relationships with other business organisations. More than half of the present Club are 'special interest' sections of the Local Chamber or LEC. A number Clubs have indicated an interest in closer links with the Institute of Export.

Co-operation with other bodies:

- Avoids duplication of effort and events
- Provides a better focus of events
- Minimises waste of organisations time
- Gives a more professional appearance
- Enhances opportunities for success
- Improves the image and presence of all involved bodies

### **REMEMBER**

1. Make an effort to co-operate
2. Extend the hand of friendship and offer co-operation
3. Practice and encourage open communication.
4. **BE POSITIVE**

### **LOOK TO THE FUTURE**

1. Approach the Universities, Colleges, Sixth-forms and Schools - they are tomorrow's Exporters.
2. Offer to support their 'business' teaching programmes, the are mentoring schemes for schools project business groups - take the Export Club message into these schemes.

## **9. THE ROLE OF SECG AND HOW IT CAN HELP**

- SECG is the Scottish Export Clubs Group, comprising one representative from each region in Scotland
- The central administration of SECG is provided by the Executive Co-ordinator, a role filled by someone with first-hand and active experience in International trading.
- The SECG Management Committee is appointed at the annual conference, and is drawn from the private sector.
- Information and concerns on export related matters and practice, advised by Clubs and members, is considered by SECG and, when appropriate, is advised on through SDI, thus fulfilling a 'lobbying' role on behalf of Clubs and members.
- SECG is responsible for the group Web-site, and negotiating its continued funding through sponsorship. SECG is always interested in 'news' of Club and members successes and activities. News stories and photographs should be sent to the Executive Co-ordinator, who is the Webmaster.
- New Export Clubs will be encouraged to seek affiliation to SECG.
- SECG can assist in identifying good speakers and topics.
- The Executive Co-ordinator will visit all Clubs at least once each year, and advise on Best Practice.
- SECG will provide an information pack to facilitate the formation of a new Export Club, and will also provide guidance on forming a steering committee for the formation of the new Club.
- SECG will seek to improve ties, and improve communications, between all Clubs in Scotland.
- The Executive Co-ordinator will organise the annual Chairman's conference, and the annual secretaries' / co-ordinator's meeting to discuss programme topics and speakers.
- SECG wishes to ensure professionalism and high standards. These guidelines have been developed to assist in this process.