



BOATBAGS™

AHOY-BOATS

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A wide range of topics came up at the 2008 Rowing Barcamp. Here is a ramble through most of them, with ideas and thoughts which might be of interest.

**a) Why it's important to know what's being written on the internet about your club.**

— How to set up a Google Alert for your club name and well-known shortenings / abbreviations. Go to the Google home page [www.google.com](http://www.google.com) or .co.uk and click on the news link.. On the left side menu is a button "News Alerts". Put in your club name (and well known abbreviations) and the type (choose comprehensive for everything) and the email address to send the information to you.

— It matters because what people write about you may be read by people who might join in the future - particularly juniors who are very active online. And their parents will research the club as well on behalf of their children. The information they find will affect their attitude to you and their future actions.

— What you can do - read the popular forums regularly and have someone on the committee whose job is to check out what is being written and report back to the committee as and when.

— Can you do anything about it? There is no fixed answer. If there is a strongly libellous statement, you can ask the moderator to take it down. Or you can note the sentiment and if you feel it is unjustified, you can start to write more positive things in places where you control the content e.g. club website, press releases, club newsletters to try and counter the assertion.

— If you are prepared to listen, there are good, positive things you can learn. But remember, it is a decentralised 'opinion monitor' and means the centre/committee can't control every communication.

**b) What can a brand/club do to respond to anonymous postings?**

Background: if we consider clubs to be like commercial brands, it is easier to work out how to advertise them, and also how to respond to views expressed about them.

- Within a public forum you ignore them because they are trolls.
- Things that could be put in place to change the tone of a forum. See <http://silkcharm.blogspot.com/2008/08/how-to-moderate-forum.html>
- There is a silent positive majority on a forum – they read but don't get involved. You have to recruit people to do this for you. This is also relevant to any club that wants to run a news group or a forum. Start with a positive intent to set the environment and the boundaries so that it is clear what acceptable group behaviour is. Even when you don't control it (eg TalkRowing), have someone who can read it regularly, and report back to the club committee anything they need to know about their public image.
- New joiners follow the behaviours that are already extant on the site. If you run your own site, you can set the tone early on.
- Frequently people or clubs are surprised that positive things are written about them online as well as offline.
- If a posting is libellous, go to the moderator and request that it be taken off. Check the terms of service - they should be able to take stuff down since libel is against UK law.

### **c) The ARA's web interactions.**

- In conversation with Alistair Groves (ARA webmaster) there has been a change in policy now: they now don't link out off the site onto other places. BUT they will publish news, particularly regional news on the regional pages. See <http://www.ara-rowing.org/> , regional sections.
- Not all regional coaching development officers (CDOs) use the internet effectively to unite and communicate with their region. In the early days of RCDOs some regions were more proactive than others. North east has a mailing list everyone can sign up for. In some regions they would find out who all the coaches were and get email lists. And communicate out all the time, reminders of what's going on.
- Now the north and NE works well, but the briefs aren't consistently applied across the regions.
- The ARA doesn't collect email addresses. CDO's could (eg coaches) for circulating local information but not all do.
- Our issue with ARA Divisional Reps is that they are not just to feed us information from the centre - you are supposed to represent our views back to the centre as well. and what are the issues happening and can we tell you what we think about them.

### **d) Setting up a recreational training group.**

- sharing the fun without having to compete.

— Can a 'best practice guide' be produced by clubs like TTRC and TSS who have in the past successfully set up these groups?

**e) Things you can learn from brand marketing which can be used when working with sports organisations.**

— Any brand can aim to be recruiting or retaining

— It's expensive to recruit and easier and cheaper to retain.

— When you have new members, you need to think about how to keep them - what will keep them interested once they have joined. Is your draughty changing room giving a negative impression?

— However, things you put in place for new recruits (eg hot showers, a bar) will help with retention of members too. Thinking about what a newcomer might expect can lead you to retain well.

**f) When sending athletes for national / regional selection**

— If you think you have a reasonable case to make that selection has missed a trick - do fight your corner. The selectors will usually listen if you want to go and argue your case.

**g) Social Media can help your club with free communication tools**

Useful online tools that can be used to keep in touch with members and audiences for your events.

Note that there is a lot of overlap and some sites fulfill more than one function:

— Free, un-moderated newsgroups - these can be used for advertising events and finding advice from other people who might have tried what you are about to do (worldwide). Examples RSR, NorthEast Rowing newsgroup (can also be accessed as a mailing list). RSR through Google Groups (<http://groups.google.co.uk/>) NERN through <http://www.nerowing.com> .

— Local newsgroups and mailing lists - these can be used for getting word out locally - worth setting up for club information. Less useful for results because often only subscribers can access them. Write to moderators and ask them to publish your advert - handy if you want a new audience for your event or product or service. Examples - Oxford and Cambridge colleges run University group lists, some clubs have their own email lists.

— Social networking sites - these can be used for connecting with a self-selecting group. A wider use than email groups because you can share pictures, video. Good for the group that spends a lot of time online. On some you can set up a special group for a particular group e.g. reunions, particular crews or events. Facebook <http://www.facebook.com> , MySpace <http://www.myspace.com> (individuals less than clubs), Linked in <http://www.linkedin.com> , World Rowing Network <http://www.worldrowingnetwork.com> .

— Message boards - these can be used for notices for upcoming events, urgent information e.g. cancellations. They are checked regularly by a lot of people and are good for timely information. They

are often public rather than just for a particular group, though sometimes only local members can post to them. Examples include TalkRowing <http://www.talkrowing.co.uk> , Rowing Illustrated <http://www.rowingillustrated.com/> , but also club boards (eg City of Bristol RC, Oxford colleges, Cambridge colleges, York City RC, Hereford RC, Worcester RC, Black Sheep RC etc). If it's a closed board, ask the local moderator to post notices for you.

— Forums - these can be used for general chat, gossip and banter. sometimes good advice sneaks in! There is cross-over between forums and message boards. Examples - Talk Rowing, RSR, Rowing Illustrated, Cambridge Message Boards

— Photo and video upload sites - these can be used for a gallery for your club photos without having to host it yourself and also for videos. This also gets you publicity for people who don't know about rowing websites because they are very 'searchable'. YouTube <http://www.youtube.com> , Flickr <http://www.flickr.com> , Facebook <http://www.facebook.com> .

### **ROWING TEAM JOKE**

Yeshiva University decided to field a rowing team. Unfortunately, they lose race after race. Even though they practice and practice for hours Everyday, they never manage to come in any better than dead last. Finally, the team decides to send Morris Fishbein, its captain, to spy on Harvard, the perennial championship team. So Morris schlepps off to Cambridge and hides in the bushes next to the Charles River, where he carefully watches the Harvard team at its daily practices.

After a week, Morris returns to Yeshiva. "Well, I figured out their Secret", he announces.

"What? Tell us! Tell us!" his teammates shout.

"We should have only one guy yelling. The other eight should row."

### **h) Live Skype chat with Mahe Drysdale – the big man's answers:**

— "I am having a break in San Francisco –and before that I was in Norway for Olaf Tufte's wedding. Training on the fjords. at the Olympics the Swedes were staying in the apartments near us and I met Katharine Kluff's sister.... Possible identical twins!"

— "Talking about the Evers-Swindells retirement announcement....earlier in the year there was no way they would continue. Things started turning round at the Olympics... I think they might have a year out and decide rowing wasn't so bad. But that is just a guess."

— "I don't know yet if I am carrying on. taking it easy just now."

— "Meet the Kiwis at the Head of the Charles Regatta on Saturday night at Hong Kong in Harvard Square."

### **Summary of the first Rowing Barcamp**

— This was really interesting despite there being no firm agenda...

— There are many things we can learn off each other just by chatting over a coffee.

**For more information about barcamps and possible rowing barcamp options, talk to Rebecca Caroe, [rebecca@caroe.com](mailto:rebecca@caroe.com)**