

SQUAREUPB.C. Report

to the Annual General Meeting

of the B.C. Square & Round Dance Federation, Penticton -- August 10, 2012

Since the object of this report is to explain the various tasks performed by SQUAREUPB.C. since August of 2011, it will include a review of some of the information presented at the Board of Directors Meeting at Victoria.

For those who are unaware, SQUAREUPB.C. is a marketing initiative of the Federation. A marketing approach requires that attention be given to creating an attractive product or service, presenting it at a desirable place or location for a representative value-based price before launching the promotion or advertising.

We have a great challenge on our hands to meet the need of the next generation for a dance instruction “product” or, in our case, service that requires far less commitment to learning. All they want to do is dance without an extensive period of instruction. Promoting or advertising dance programs that don’t satisfy their needs and wants will not be fruitful, no matter how hard we try.

In the Fall, several internal press releases saw publication in the square dance print media Valley Circle, Cross Trail News and the electronic/print medium known as the Cariboo Connection. The purpose was to inform the dance community of a new Federation Twitter page and reveal new research such as how Baby Boomers may reject snow-birding and how our “Dancing Keeps You Young” online video feature surpassed 1,000 views. That video has now achieved over 2,600 views.

Another press release topic was about the health-orientated article on Vancouver Island’s dancers that was published with photographs in September, 2011, by Senior Living magazine. The Senior Living article is still available for viewing on the magazine’s web site and has had over 677 views so far. The online version contains fewer photos than seen in print. Find it online at: <http://www.seniorlivingmag.com/articles/dancing-keeps-you-young>

Suggested online video sources where our recreation can be sampled were sent to Alberta Ballet following an inquiry from them. In the Spring of 2013, they’ll be launching a special ballet performance to the music of Canada’s K.D. Lang and a square dance theme for one of the songs is of interest. Their creative director was seeking to understand the flavour and style of the modern square dance.

Much time has been devoted over the Fall and Winter to learning how to promote our recreation through social media. The use of social media can be an extension of our marketing and, since we are a social recreation, it’s a perfect match.

Participation in several online “webinars” has been undertaken with the social media company “Connect Wisdom.” Analytics, such as who and how many are “tuned-in,” and the purchase of advertising on social media were also studied. The Baby Boomers, the next generation to which we have to appeal, are most savvy to use of the new communication tools.

Since last Summer, several new internet initiatives engaging social media have been launched to improve our marketing effort:

For a while now, we’ve had a Twitter page listing Federation activity and notices at: www.twitter.com/bcfeeddancenews. Now, in addition to that, we have a Twitter page that’s intended to be more interactive at the address: www.twitter.com/bcfedlive. It invites the dance community to dialogue about their enjoyment of dancing and reveal other joyful elements about their lives that show we’re just regular people. It’s a long-range strategy of “cultivating” others toward the benefits of joining our activity. Those with Twitter accounts, available for free, can follow it and it will follow them. Your message, or “tweet,” just has to be said in 140 characters or less. It’s rather like a news bulletin that can include photos, videos and web page links.

If all dance-related tweets contain the hashtag #bcfedlive, everyone can search for a complete list of messages containing that tag. Furthermore, messages containing the hashtag #(yourcityname) allow your message to be searchable with others containing that city name, thereby letting your message target your city’s residents specifically—great for announcing your new dancer sessions! It’s a chance to get an overview of the fun had by our square and round dance community and to share it with friends, family and the general public, gaining publicity.

Our B.C. Federation now has a presence on Facebook. Although our site is still under construction, it features a fabulous picture of a floor full of square dancers and the profile tells about our dance forms. Find us and “like” us, as Facebook users do, at: www.facebook.com/BCSquareAndRoundDanceFederation (also accepted in all lower case).

We also now have an online place where thoughts, opinions and ideas about our recreation can be shared like a letter to the editor or an article or essay. That’s basically what a blog is about and our blog pages can be found at www.blog.squaredance.bc.ca The heading reads: “Celebrate, Discuss, Suggest, Inspire! A Blog Space About Square Dancing and its Related Dance Forms.”

There you’ll find several articles, among them one asking our callers to help the next generation discover our activity while meeting the challenge of their new needs and wants. Another article applauds round dancing as a full-participation dance form, made so by the way a cuer provides all the direction that you need on the dance floor. We’re using the excellent blogging software known as “WordPress” and your contributions are invited.

Our professional-looking health-orientated brochure entitled “Your Prescription for Better Health” is now posted on the internet as a two-colour printable pdf document. It can be found at: www.BetterHealth.squaredance.bc.ca (also accepted in all lower case). The brochure will appear as two poster pages but it is intended to be printed double-sided and folded into 3 equal sections.

The 8-CD audio series called “Moving and Grooving” is still available by donation. Intended for schools and community groups, it’s a complete instruction resource that’s also perfect for any areas of B.C. where caller-teachers are not available. Tell people, especially school teachers, that information about it can be found online at: www.MovingandGrooving.squaredance.bc.ca (also accepted in all lower case).

Still, one of our most valuable promotional tools is the 10-minute online video “Dancing Keeps You Young.” Tell everyone about it! In entertaining fashion, it details the many benefits of square dancing and actually shows the process of how new dancers learn. Find it at: www.DancingKeepsYouYoung.ca (also accepted in all lower case).

Of course, our Dance Connection web site is at your service although it is somewhat less user-friendly for the new dancer prospect to find information fast: www.squaredance.bc.ca

As initiated by your B.C. Federation Board of Directors at their March 31st meeting in Victoria, a social media campaign to promote new dancers provincewide is underway, funded by several thousand dollars. It is being produced and managed by your marketing initiative, SQUAREUPB.C. The first phase started July 15th on Facebook. The campaign will run until the end of September.

In the first week, we had a total of 60 demographically-targeted people click on our ad to see more information. That’s averaging more than 8 people a day—people specifically interested in our activity.

Additional approaches are now active such as through Google AdWords, including YouTube advertising. If funding allows, the 30 second square dance ad produced for the Canadian Society and used in past national cable tv campaigns might be revised and start to appear as well on YouTube.

Newly-created for our social media campaign are three different promotional web pages relevant to targeted persons in our campaign. Each web page zeros-in on specific demographic groups in an effort to appeal to them more effectively. In internet marketing terms, the pages are called “landing pages” and our advertisements, such as on Facebook, link directly to the appropriate landing page. One targets the Baby Boomers, another those born after the Boomers (Generation X’ers) and the third is aimed at pre-teens and teens along with their parents, in an effort to boost interest in the four youth clubs in our province.

An exhaustive drive to obtain details on new square dancer sessions throughout the province resulted in a comprehensive listing that is shown on each landing page.

The three landing pages can be accessed directly at these addresses:

www.TakeMeDancing.squaredance.bc.ca

www.Dancing30Somethings.squaredance.bc.ca

www.KidsLoveToDance.squaredance.bc.ca

An extensive presentation was made to the Board of Directors at the Victoria meeting, entitled: "Square Dance Makeover: A New Menu for a New Customer." It revealed a steady decline in dancer numbers. It addressed research that tells us the Baby Boomers "think, act and are motivated in entirely different ways from the previous generation." We must adapt to their needs and wants. Copies of the presentation can be accessed through an e-mail to brian@squaredance.bc.ca

As a result of that presentation, a new committee was struck to explore dance instruction options that are more appealing to the Baby Boomers, particularly ones of shorter duration. That committee was named the "Makeover Team" and is comprised of Gordon Ruedig, Brian Elmer, Nick Turner and Lyle O'Hara as Chairperson. Funding in the amount of \$2000 was assigned to be directed at pilot programs or projects that test new approaches. Congratulations to the callers and dancers on Upper Vancouver Island for planning such a project that they're calling "West Coast Square Dancing."

Several of the Makeover Team members attended the recent U.S. National Square Dance Convention in Spokane, Washington, and were able to meet and also attend some of the educational seminars and panels. Many presenters, including professional callers, are sounding the alarm for change in the dance instruction that we offer the public, especially promoting shorter programs.

Also heard at some of the U.S. National's education sessions was criticism of dancers and dance leadership for inadequately promoting our recreation before the public. We're still allowing our activity to be one of the best-kept secrets. One critical point was that we're "closet square dancers," meaning that we quietly attend dances without telling friends, relatives or co-workers that we enjoy square and round dancing. Many ideas were presented to resolve that, even some as simple as broadly distributing cheaply-produced ballpoint pens containing a promotional message with contact information.

There has been extraordinary success in the Central Okanagan in seeking publicity the year-round through the submission of press releases and photos to community newspapers. Sometimes, it was just a good photo with a suggested caption. Dance events for Christmas, Leap Year, St. Patrick's, Graduation, fundraisers, display dancing or even square dancers cruising or attending conventions were opportunities for press exposure. Two publications,

one serving all of the Central Okanagan and another, serving West Kelowna and Peachland, have consistently used the material submitted, sometimes presenting 2-page spreads with colour photos.

Community newspapers serve the area from which your club wants to attract new dancers. The paper is seeking local content as their community identity and an active local dance club can furnish some of that content. Furthermore, our dance form is so photogenic through its action and colour that it's ideal subject matter.

In short, any special club events can be reason to have your publicity person write a press release, select several of the best shots in a resolution of 300 dots-per-inch or more from lots of well-framed, well-lit photos and e-mail them to your community newspaper editors. Many photos should picture dancers living in the community that the paper serves and their names should be submitted, with accurate spelling. Those same photos can gain additional publicity if posted on social media such as Twitter and Facebook. For more guidance on the process, e-mail brian@squaredance.bc.ca.

Please make good use of the health-orientated promotional brochure, developed by your Federation. It is considered a useful promotional tool in light of the interest in good health by our new customers, the Baby Boomers. Please make use of it by placing several copies in health-orientated facilities in communities where new dancer sessions will take place. Do so well ahead of time.

The brochure can also be handed out alongside the health-centered pull-up promotional screen that each region was gifted by the Federation. The screen is a simple way to promote at malls or community events such as Fall Fairs but book your space soon. It should only be used indoors because its light weight cannot withstand wind. Our president, Norm Cox, can furnish you with the brochures.

Do remember that a couple of our most basic communications and marketing tools are the toll-free INFOLINE at 1-800-335-9433 and e-mail through info@squaredance.bc.ca

Remember that we're observing "Square Dance Awareness Week" in mid-September. Regional associations and their member clubs should be planning what you'll be doing to make our activity stand out at that time.

Should you have the opportunity to promote our activity through commercial or cable tv interviews, remember that each region took delivery in the Summer of 2010 of a DVD disc containing unedited raw video footage of square, round and clog dancing at Festival 2009 in Vernon. Using that during a tv interview, you can tell about the fun that we have on the dance floor and show some of it as well.

SQUAREUPB.C. is available to assist regional promotion committees or even club publicity/promotion persons. Contact Brian Elmer by phone at 250-768-2694 or e-mail brian@squaredance.bc.ca

This concludes the SQUAREUPB.C. report to the Annual General Meeting.

Respectfully submitted,
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SQUAREUPB.C. Chairperson