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## Guide to Promoting your U3A



### Getting Started

The purpose of this booklet is to help you promote your U3A, to raise its profile in your area and attract new members. The booklet provides a range of ideas and strategies that are low cost and effective. Whether your U3A is large or small, brand new or has been established for a long time, there should be a promotional strategy in this guide that will assist your organisation in reaching its goals.

No U3A can exist without members so, the first step is to engage your community. Surprisingly, there will be people out there who've never heard of U3A so you need to inform them of what you have to offer, the social benefits of being a member and most importantly, a schedule of classes including all the detail of the tutor, their experience in the subject, the day and time the class will operate and of course, the cost of membership and the class fee if applicable.

To make this happen, it is advisable to have a dedicated person to run your publicity, public relations and advertising and this person should ideally be a member of the Management Committee. However, I will mention this in more detail a little further on in this booklet.

Publicity can take many forms and can vary from area to area, so a little experimentation may be in order to see what actually works. Be flexible and try as many of the ideas covered in this booklet as possible to see what works best for your U3A. Of course, your U3A may have promotional ideas not mentioned in this booklet so, please advise of your successes and so we can share these with others.

Members are the lifeblood of any U3A which means publicity in some form will be necessary to inform prospective members of your organisation so please give this area of your operation the importance it deserves.

# Newsletters

Newsletters play an important role in keeping your members informed and to foster their sense of belonging so, it's important that each edition be distributed to all members with additional copies placed at strategic locations throughout your local community (tourist information bureau, local council offices, etc). Identify a suitable person in your membership to be the editor.

The Newsletter does not need to be an elaborate publication but does need to be suitable to its readership. Frequency of publication is a matter for your Committee to decide, and typically it will be either monthly or quarterly. Free photocopying is often available at your local MP or Councillor's office.

Here are some guidelines for the editorial team:

- Provide information on current courses/activities, and on those planned for the future;
- Be wary of including commercial advertising. Your membership may feel that they are being exploited.
- Do not use material which shows any form of bias (ageism, racism, sexism, political, religious). Your membership will represent a wide spectrum of the community and will reflect vastly differing opinions/attitudes.
- Encourage contributions from members (letters, articles, reports of activities, anecdotes, etc.)
- Be aware of the requirements of the Copyright Act if you plan to use work that you feel may have already been published.
- Use a clear typeface that is not too small - some members will have failing eyesight.
- Try to obtain copies of a Newsletter/Program from other U3As to see how they communicate with their members. If you do not know where to find another U3A, and have Internet access, use the "Find Queensland U3As" page on the Network Queensland website: [www.u3aqlld.org.au](http://www.u3aqlld.org.au) and follow the prompts to find the U3A you are searching for. While you are there, you can supply your own details on the info email address: [info.u3aqlld@gmail.com](mailto:info.u3aqlld@gmail.com) so that others can find you! It is also a good idea to send your newsletter to Network Queensland for inclusion on our Facebook page, that way all of Queensland gets to read what is happening in your local area.
- Last but not least, send any items of interest to our Network News editor for inclusion in the quarterly edition of "Network News". We have a dedicated email address for these submissions: [editornews.u3aqlld@gmail.com](mailto:editornews.u3aqlld@gmail.com)

## Class Schedule

To advise your members of what is on offer in classes, you will need to issue a programme at the commencement of each term/semester/year to give your members details of the planned programme of activities.

The class schedule is a very important document and should be made available to all members in the form of a hard copy, an email and also placed in your newsletter, website and Facebook page if you have one. If you have an office, always leave copies on the counter for people to take as it can become a very effective marketing tool.

## Networking

While your U3A will be autonomous and completely in control of its own destiny, it will benefit from interaction with other groups. Try to establish regular contact with those nearest to you. If you're lucky this will mean face-to-face contact. While the Australian 'tyranny of distance' makes this impractical for some, there's always the telephone, email, websites and Facebook to assist in maintaining contact. Members of the Network Committee endeavour to travel to regional areas whenever possible to meet with committees and members to discuss local issues.

And there is always the State Conference which is normally held in May every year at various venues across the state so, why not make a holiday of it and attend? You will meet like-minded people from across the state and Australia at times to discuss what happens in other areas. This is recommended as there is always something to learn at these conferences and they can also be a lot of fun.

## Appointing the correct person

It is extremely important that the correct person be appointed to carry out the pivotal role of Publicity & Advertising officer. Ideally, this person should have some experience in the fields of either advertising, public relations or some other publicity-based role in their working life.

This should then ensure they are aware of what is required and possibly even have contacts on which they can draw for assistance. They should generally be comfortable with media contact, be able to conduct radio or TV interviews and have the ability to organise any form of advertising that might be required such as press, leaflets and the printing of promotional material.

## Website Presence

In the digital world of today, it is essential that your U3A has a website presence to engage with prospective new members, to accept new member applications online, for existing members to renew and, of course, to promote your U3A. This doesn't have to be a very complicated site, you can make it as simple or interactive as you like but it is important to have a presence in the digital world. As most people will discover your website through a Google search, it is essential to have your important email addresses and Facebook page linked to your site.

If possible, search among your members for someone who has IT experience and is familiar with building and maintaining websites. It is quite easy to build your own site for free with the help of places like Google sites but, you will have to use a web host to publish your page. These are quite inexpensive. If this is not possible, look to a local IT specialist to handle this for you at a nominal fee. Don't forget to advise them that U3A is a not for profit organisation. This will hopefully reduce the costs.

## Social Media

Facebook is a great way of, not only communicating with your members, but with U3As in other areas as well. If you don't have a Facebook presence, it is highly recommended that you establish one for your U3A and then "Like" other U3As, including U3A Network Queensland. Doing so will keep your U3A up to date with what is happening within the wider U3A organisation. It is also helpful to "like" media organisations such as the ABC and any other organisations that you think may be helpful in supplying interesting news items. To operate a successful Facebook page, it is essential to continually post items to hold the interest of your existing or prospective members. It is also advisable to include photos wherever possible as these increase the visual impact of your posts.

Facebook is easy to set up, it's free and, if any assistance is required, Network Queensland is always happy to advise. You will be surprised about how many of your members are on Facebook. Our demographic is now the largest user of this form of social media.

Most U3As now have a Facebook presence as does U3A Network Queensland.

## Email

It would be very difficult to operate your U3A these days without email. This is an absolute necessity, especially for your Management Committee . It isn't just messages that make email a useful tool because, if you can send your newsletter to members by bulk email and encourage members to receive it this way that will save on postage expenses. Also, don't forget to link the newsletter to your website for maximum impact. This also has the potential of saving quite a lot of money as it cuts back on the number of hard copies that need to be produced.

## Open Days

Why not consider having an annual Open Day where prospective members can come and see what your U3A is all about? Perhaps plan on having an information stall at the local Seniors Week or Adult Learning Week. Many U3As conduct an Open or Sign on Day at the beginning of the year with a great deal of success. On these days' members can select their classes for the year and new members can join so, why not give it a go? Of course, one of the best forms of publicity is "word-of-mouth". Many people have joined U3A because a friend or neighbour told them how much they were enjoying the experience.

## Shopping Centre Displays

This is another great way of getting your message out to the general public about what your U3A has to offer. Most shopping centres have community promotion opportunities and/or casual renting arrangements whereby you can rent a space in their mall for a nominal fee. Don't forget to mention you are a not for profit, it could get you a free space at best or, at worst, a substantial discount. This rental could be for a couple of days to a week and, it gets you where the action is to be able to talk face to face with potential new members. At most, all you will require is a table, chairs and some promotional material. A pull-up banner is also recommended for use at these displays and these can be sourced inexpensively from places such as Officeworks. You will, however, have to supply the artwork.

## Media Interviews

Being interviewed by your local radio or TV station is a great way of getting your message out at no cost. Most radio stations, particularly those in regional areas, are always on the lookout for interesting stories. All you have to do is to ask for some air time and they will normally be only too happy to oblige. You can even ask journalists at your local regional newspaper. If possible, try to nurture a relationship with someone in a media organisation as this will make the process of requesting interviews, or any other media exposure for that matter, that little bit easier.

## Radio & Television

Unless you have a huge budget, these types of advertising campaigns are not recommended. They are normally very expensive, especially in larger regional centres, and may not necessarily be effective. With the proliferation of paid subscription channels such as Foxtel, Stan & Netflix, the effectiveness of free to air TV has declined immensely over the last couple of years. On top of the costs of TV air-time, factors such as commercial production also have to be considered. Radio is a little less expensive and production costs negligible, but this could still be a risky strategy because there are numerous radio stations covering many genres and you could end up promoting to the completely wrong audience.

Having said all that, there is still a place for these types of media. If you can get on-air interviews on either medium, grab the opportunity with both hands, but, make sure you are well prepared, and you have a good, interesting story to tell during the interview.

## Newspapers

Unfortunately, the effectiveness of press advertising has diminished greatly since the advent of the digital age so an enormous amount of money could be wasted using newspapers. Having said that, if you have a local paper that is willing to give you space to tell your story in an advertorial, you may only have to spend a minimal amount to obtain some decent coverage.

Of course, if you have a great story to tell or wish to advise the community of an event, I would recommend sending this to your local paper as it may just get published.

## Promoting Offline

Not everything you do to promote your U3A has to be digital. There is still a place for printed promotional material which can be used at shopping centre displays, given to members to distribute to friends or perhaps you may prefer to design a flyer to distribute as a mail out. Whatever form you wish to use, it is highly recommended that you employ the talents of a graphic designer or someone in your ranks with the talents to design a professional looking leaflet. Another suggestion is for your key personnel to have business cards with their titles. This will give your organisation a very professional look. These can be sourced very economically from companies such as Vista Print.

Remember, not all your promotional activities need to be expensive campaigns. On the contrary, there are plenty of opportunities to advertise your U3A either for free or very inexpensively such as advertorial in your local paper, radio or TV interviews can be very effective and, as previously mentioned, your members are invaluable in spreading the word.

## Public Engagements

Another great strategy is to make someone available to speak at other clubs and organisations such as Probus, National Seniors or Rotary. These clubs are quite often looking for speakers for their monthly meetings or information days and are a great way of getting your message across to a wider audience. Many U3As already use this strategy with great effect. The person you choose for this role should be adept at public speaking and a good communicator. Don't forget to take plenty of promotional material to support the talk.

Also, why not invite other organisations to talk at your U3A? This not only gives your U3A a speaker, but that person is then made aware of what U3A is all about and takes that back to those members - a win, win all round.

## U3A Logo

Most U3As identify themselves with their own particular logo but it is highly recommended that member U3As also use the recognised international logo as shown on the next page of this booklet. This not only identifies your organisation as a member of U3A Network Queensland, it also associates you with the U3A international movement.

This logo is the intellectual property of the U3A Trust in the UK however, negotiations are almost concluded which will give all U3A Networks and groups the legal right to use this logo in Australia.

The logo can be downloaded from the Network website: [www.u3aqld.org.au](http://www.u3aqld.org.au)

## Network Support

Don't forget that U3A Network Queensland is here to assist in making your U3A as successful as it can be, that is an essential part of our role. We are here to help should you need advice on any facet of your operation.

As part of our service to you, Network Queensland has available generic leaflets and bookmarks which are ideal for promoting your U3A. Samples are shown on the following pages. Just ask and a quantity will be sent for your use.

