

Case Study

A review of key actions that have contributed rapid growth at a regional Victorian Judo Club between 2011 and 2013

Carroll, S 2013, *Aspire Judo Academy*.

Background

In 2010 Judo Victoria released a four year strategic plan aimed at developing judo in Victoria. Within this period a member club, Aspire Judo Academy (formerly Ballarat Judo Club) has experienced its most rapid period of growth for over two decades. Whilst a number of environmental factors may be impacting on this growth, club management believe that some of its deliberate actions are also contributing factors. In order to further encourage growth in judo participation in Victoria, the club felt that sharing this information at a state level may be beneficial. This case history, based on experience rather than marketing theory, is the culmination of a club level review to help explain recent developments.

Please note that the club has used the names of the web-based programs we have used to support our development. Our intention is not to push these platforms onto others, they are simply the ones we have successfully used and seem to be fit for purpose in the current climate. We recommend that you use what works for your club and be prepared to adapt your approach over time and as social and media trends change.

Overview of club growth

At the beginning of 2010 the then Ballarat Judo Club operated over two sites in Ballarat. The primary venue was a small country hall outside of Ballarat (Scotsburn Hall) with the second venue being at a local taekwondo (TKD) club with approximately 400 TKD students. At Scotsburn the available mat space was 36m², whilst the TKD club venue had a concrete slab covered with approximately 200m² of 20mm jigsaw mats and a 24m² area of thicker mats, unfortunately it still provided a firmer than desirable fall. Student numbers were low at both locations with the Scotsburn venue regularly hosting between 4 and 6 students, and the town based TKD class seeing very similar numbers although very occasionally as many as 12 would attend as Black belt TKD students were encouraged to cross-train.

In the middle of 2011, a former student of the club brought her children to Scotsburn to see if they could participate in a class. At this time the Scotsburn venue had no juniors in attendance. This person spoke to a number of friends and family members in order to attempt to develop the numbers to make a junior class viable. The coach at the club supported this action by doing the same. Within a short period of time approximately 7 - 9 juniors (depending on weekly attendance) from 4 years to 11 years of age, began doing judo at the club. It was clear via feedback from attendees, that the location was an

issue. It was also clear from a space point of view, that the venue and mat space would not allow meaningful growth to occur in either senior or junior classes. Thus a new venue was sought.

At the time of writing this case history, the club celebrated its first anniversary as the tenant of a church hall near the town centre of Ballarat after the coach had recently resigned from casual employment at the TKD School. Thirty-seven students from age 4 - 64 years attended class in the first week of term (2013) with a number of potential students coming along to watch and the club having received over 10 enquiries in the week leading up to the first class of the year. The mat space was still modest at 63m². In a week of pre-season training immediately prior to the first official class of the year and without any of the <10 year old students invited, 20 students attended which meant that as a result of the mat space available, students had to participate in some elements of the class in shifts.

Key actions and explanations

The review of actions conducted by club management indicated that the following actions were likely to have impacted on the increasing attendance:

- Club venue change
- Implementation of the Long Term Athlete Development (LTAD) strategy
- Implementation of an online marketing plan to support other actions

Club venue change

It's commonly claimed that location is of vital importance in business development. Feedback suggested that the 15 kilometre trip to Scotsburn Hall was a substantial issue in attracting and retaining judoka to the club. The new venue is within 1km of the city centre, within 700m of the train station and 100m of a bus stop. It also has adequate parking facilities. Prior to the successful approach to use the hall by the club (refused for philosophical reasons some 8 years previous), it had been used infrequently by the church and not by any external parties for approximately 5 years.

Relocating to Ballarat (and to a venue with a wooden floor which wasn't available at the other Ballarat location) has clearly had an impact on attendance due to ease of access.

LTAD

The club coach researched and implemented the LTAD approach which is being utilised in a number of counties across a range of sports including judo. Details on this approach, which utilizes developmental ages of participants to guide programming, are readily available on the internet.

The rationale for using this approach is to provide age appropriate training in order to attract, excite and retain (or let go but with fond experiences in order to increase the chances of returning while specialisation is still feasible) students of all ages.

The turnover (churn) percentage of students aged between 4 and 10 years has been approximately 20% per term on average over the past 6 terms, which management believes to be very good given the

profile of the sport and the term by term approach many parents are observed to take in scheduling activities for their children.

In the future we also expect to tailor classes to specific groups of participants as demand emerges. These may include classes for competitive players, recreational players, kata, self-defence, newaza, corporate, schools and fitness. We feel that the better we can focus our training on key markets; the more likely we are to meet their needs.

We are hopeful that the positive experiences we provide are more likely to build positive long-term relations with our consumers (and their networks) and enhance our reputation.

Online marketing

Over the past 2 years the club has incrementally and in a fairly unplanned manner, implemented an online strategy that on reflection and following feedback has potentially supported the growth of the club and reinforced our real-world actions.

A number of tools beyond those discussed in this section are also being developed and implemented but their effectiveness are difficult to ascertain at this stage of their application.

Web site

In the early 2000's a web-site was developed for the club that has probably caused as much harm as good throughout the last ten years. It is outdated and contains pictures and information that may give an impression of the club as a small and unprofessional outfit. The club doesn't have the resources to remove it and have learned a lot from having this piece of virtual real estate circulating the web.

The first lesson learned was to get a web-site that we could either manage ourselves and would allow us to present ourselves well, or invest in a responsive and professional company that could do it for us. We chose the former after hearing numerous stories of similar organisations being frustrated by non-responsive providers. One of our students suggested using the 'Jimdo' platform as a quick, easy, cheap and professional looking platform that is incredibly easy to work with. Our fairly non-technical web administrator now agrees with the student to the point that the club has become an affiliate partner promoting the platform. We believe the key things to consider are that; that contact forms work, contact details are current, it is easy to navigate, and that the site is not too big that you can't keep information within it consistent and reasonably current. We update news items regularly and have followed the simple suggestions of the platform to ensure we can be found by major search engines and are more likely than not to engage viewers.

Our suggestions are that at a minimum, clubs should update their site after every JVI competition in which their students participate and at least once over each school holiday break, or alternatively, once every month. We suggest that all clubs managing a website make sure someone is clearly responsible for this task and that it gets done (period). Most of the content will be pretty stable but important events and competition results will need to be updated to demonstrate that the site is current. It is also important to remember that if information is covered in different areas it needs to match up.

Our website links to Google’s email product (gmail) because we can also use features such as calendars and perhaps more importantly the google analytics tool so we can track with detail who is looking, for how long, from what locations, at what pages, using what key words, how often they look and how many are new and return visitors. This allows us to make modifications to page content and our format as necessary in order to give us the best chance to be seen.

Another important issue that a local business coach identified for us was that for a period when the club seemed to be trying to attract children, our web content didn’t seem to reflect that. In other words, we needed to make sure that we had content that would appeal to the markets we were attempting to attract. We have attempted to modify this although our focus is more on parents and teachers than the children themselves.

Social media

There are a host of options when it comes to using social media and it’s very clear that social media platforms are increasingly helpful for both new and potential members.

We use Facebook and our posts here are also linked to Twitter (even though we don’t use Twitter otherwise. If you do and have the time and inclination to do it regularly, exploit it as well). We now recommend posting weekly at least; otherwise, consider removing your site as you may end up demonstrating that you are not up to date and responsive to other users. If you use social media sites at all, you really need to stay current and be in a position to respond to feedback. We only have a few “likers” (you’ll know what this means if you use the platform) compared to some others but most that follow actually “make good” and arrive at the club or actively promote our activity. If you have nothing to say, just include what you did or are doing at training for the week. Use a conversational style and keep hard sells to a minimum as people will lose patience with you very quickly. Engagement with your market is the key.

Newsletters

Although our website platform has many positive features, its newsletter templates are a bit average so we use a program called Mailchimp (only the free bits of course) to improve the situation. Fortunately Mailchimp can be readily and freely integrated into Jimdo. About 65% of our newsletters get read online and we print a few off as text only for those around the place that don’t like the online thing. The Mailchimp program allows us to link to Facebook and consumer sign ups take place through the website. We tell people that we’ll put out at least two per term and we do. If we don’t, our customer’s expectations won’t be met and we are likely disappoint them.

Sample online action plan

Term

<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>
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Newsletters

1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2
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Web updates

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
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Social media updates - weekly

Allocate time, who is responsible and when it should be complete by. Review completion at club committee or club management meetings depending on club structure.

A commonly used format including overarching objectives (what you hope to achieve) and strategies (the logic behind how you will achieve it) could look like:

Objective	Strategy	Action	Term/Month	Person responsible	Cost

Conclusion

A combination of an accessible venue, developmentally appropriate (and goal-oriented) coaching and administration and a supportive online action plan have been largely responsible for the recent rapid expansion of the Aspire judo Academy in Ballarat. We hope that the approach we have presented will help other clubs to experience similar growth and also prompts clubs with insights into their own growth to share them with the judo community in order to strengthen our sport as a whole in the long-term.