District 9350's Janey Ball and Tony Davidson are heading up a project that's using project data to create a buzz!

From information TO INSPIRATION

All passionate and engaged Rotarians know that we are part of an extraordinary global organisation. We drive phenomenal projects and positively impact society. Only those who are familiar with our good works are aware of our powerful brand and how we can make a difference.

Yet, as good as we feel we are, we do face threats. For example, the amount of effort to attract passionate members is tough as we face ever increasing competition for time and resources. There are many media savvy organisations who know how to tug heart strings and can raise lots of money for single focussed, short-term campaigns. We also live in a world of distraction, where high tech, digitally connected people have incredibly short attention spans.

Rotary, in general is about long-term, sustainable impact. As an example, we have made such a significant contribution to the eradication of polio but the public has no knowledge of this. Polio is not seen as an issue by the media and social influencers, as the disease has faded from the memory of most adults and children are oblivious of its terrible impact. More modern scourges tend to make the headlines.

Rotary's strength of autonomous clubs making their own decisions about what projects to work on paradoxically weakens our capacity to grab headlines and attention. Individual club efforts are seen and forgotten with a swipe of a thumb across a Facebook wall.

So how can we attract the attention that we need? In D9350, we believe that by collating the work of all the clubs in a district, we gather the information to really gain awareness. Rotarians do the work but fail to tell the stunning story of what we have done and how we have impacted society.

The effort has numerous other benefits; we can produce reports for different audiences. Social media messaging with punchy stats should raise awareness.

Local and provincial government and corporates with significant CSI budgets can get detailed reports that show Rotary's influence, impact and skill set.

Individual club efforts aren't seen as newsworthy but when collated to district level we provide a good news story. Media focus is therefore enhanced. Each club also produces its own mini report and can use this as a tool to assess their effectiveness as well as a marketing tool to show potential members and donors. We also produce a district-wide project database and its objective is to enhance collaboration between clubs working in similar focus areas or neighbourhoods.

D9350 has been working on producing a district report for the past four years. The uptake in the first few years was disappointing but each district governor was in favour of the concept and actively supported the collection of data. Clubs were somewhat sceptical about the benefits and concerned about the extra work required.

Each year, we improved our communication and our data collection tool. Some clubs don't like the idea of submitting some data to RI for presidential citations and other data to district. It also took a while for the district to incorporate the collection of data into its strategic thinking. Data collection was initially a one-person job but now plays a significant part of the district public image's focus.

To date, we have collected the information from clubs retrospectively. In August of each year, we ask clubs to provide us with information about projects carried out in the previous Rotary year. We provide a brief report back at the mini-conference in October and then work on the report which can be distributed widely.

2016/17 D9350 results.
- For the first time over 50 percent of clubs reported their project activity.
- Rotarians were involved in 497 separate projects,
- R32.4m was spent on projects for our various beneficiaries.
- 72 000 beneficiaries were reached by these projects.
- Rotarians sit on the boards of trustees of 47 NGOs.
- Rotarians did over 12 400 hours of volunteer time.
- Over 90 percent of the beneficiaries are in the district. Some projects cover beneficiaries in other areas of Southern Africa.
- Rotarians partnered with 116 organisations to develop and implement projects.
- Clubs from most areas of our district reported and provided a broad understanding of activity throughout the huge district that includes the Western Cape, parts of the Northern Cape, Namibia and Angola.

What are we doing with these results?
This is the first year that we have a significant set of results. We publicised the results at the District's mini-conference in October.

We started marketing how good we are by launching a social media campaign to coincide with Rotary's 113th birthday on 23rd February 2018. This campaign ran over four weeks.

The first part of the campaign included six posters which made up an infographic. Over the following three weeks, club projects which represented some aspect of Rotary were shown. Brief summaries have been written about some of the projects and can be found

at www.rotarydpi9350.com/blog and on Facebook (Rotary International D9350). We are currently planning a more traditional marketing approach, using radio and community newspapers, a press release will be sent to the media in our district with geographically relevant project reports to highlight how Rotary has made a difference in that community.

What lessons have we learnt?

- Persistence is necessary. Convincing clubs that reporting and collating project information is beneficial to all concerned has taken four years.
- We have become more strategic with our marketing to clubs. Our message, information to inspiration, struck a chord.
- DG and district leadership have bought into the concept and have been very supportive. The AGs supported the project and helped the technologically-challenged Rotarians submit reports on spreadsheets.
- Clubs which have been submitting reports every year, geared themselves up to report and found the process quick and simple.
- The data project falls under the district public image portfolio and is seen as a crucial part of the DPI's responsibility and is a key source of DPI material.
- We are learning at each stage of the process.

What next?

Businesses realise that the intelligent use of data is critical to the success of an organisation. D9350 has started to see that this exercise has so many benefits and we will continue to collate reports on our projects.

Rotary International also realised how powerful club data can be. We are aligning their requirements to those in our collection forms so that data only needs to be collected once.

To date, the projects have been reported retrospectively after the end of a Rotary year. Less organised clubs battle to collate their information. Currently, we are reporting on projects with a lag of at least eight months. Annual reports should be made timeously and released as soon as possible after the year end.

We have also been using very wide Excel spreadsheets, which are clumsy, but the data collection process is transforming to become more user friendly and current. Data can now be collected on a simpler to use Google form. These forms are available for download and can be filled out as soon as a project is completed. Once the transformation process is complete, the project information will become current.

Our vision is to create a Southern African Rotary report, covering the activities of all clubs. From this, we can also create national reports.

Imagine how inspirational our message to South Africans would be when we presented the country with a national overview of how Rotary serves the people?

Should other districts want to join us in creating inspiration from information, please don't hesitate to contact Janey Ball (janey@iafrica.com) or Tony Davidson (tondav@iafrica.com).

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