



**DATE:** September 4, 2019  
**TO:** USMS House of Delegates  
**FROM:** Dawson Hughes  
**SUBJECT:** **2019 CEO Report to the USMS House of Delegates**

---

The National Office has a multitude of metrics that we use to evaluate the performance of USMS and ourselves. Membership growth, actual expenses vs. budget, event participation, the number of clubs and how many have Gold Club status, coach and ALTS certification attendance, partnership revenue, return on marketing investments, and USMS Swimming Save Lives Foundation donations all quickly come to mind. Many of these measures are objective and easy to quantify on an annual basis. There are other measures of success that are more subjective, such as board and volunteer relations, effectiveness of communication, appropriate level of human resources, operational efficiency, membership value, and how to best deploy our staff and passionate volunteer base. These are harder to quantify but equally important. Perhaps the most important is how we are performing in relation to the USMS Strategic Plan.

It has become my annual ritual to review reports submitted to the House of Delegates from the prior year's gathering before starting my comments for the upcoming meetings. It serves as a reminder of where we stood a year ago and what we have accomplished. While reading the 2018 report, the closing remarks struck me as the logical place to begin this year's report. So, as a refresher for many of you and to get those of you up to speed that may not have seen last year's information, here is that excerpt:

---

**2019 and Beyond** (from Sept 2, 2018, CEO Report)

*Over the last 2 ½ years, USMS has innovated in support of our traditional core products. The USMS team has embarked on significant modernization projects, including USMS 3.0 - digital transformation; College Club Swimming; greater support for USMS clubs and coaches as the day-to-day connection for our members; partnership strategies with USA Swimming and other relevant NGBs; integrated marketing initiatives to attract new members and capitalize on periods of increased interest in swimming; the creation of new events to appeal to a greater percentage of our members; and championing adults learning to swim as an organizational cause-marketing initiative. This was all accomplished while also transitioning several new staff members into the National Office.*

*We have just begun to see the results of these initiatives and the impact they will have over time. We all know there isn't a 'silver bullet' answer to our challenges. Demographic and cultural changes require creative and innovative approaches to keep USMS relevant as a health, wellness, fitness, and competition option into the future.*

*We have also heard from our membership for years about more flexibility in membership offerings. Options such as automatic processing of renewals, multi-year membership choices for clubs and individuals, and segmented membership based on interest (e.g., coach, triathlon, fitness, event, open water) have a value. The expectations for these options are created based on our members' experience with other organizations. And while plenty of research and discussion must happen to determine the right approach for USMS, our only hurdles to offer new options for our members are longstanding structure and processes built before technology created more efficient methods.*

*With the right strategies and execution, we have an opportunity for incredible exposure in 2020 with the 50th anniversary of USMS combined with an Olympic year. 2019 can be a transformative year that sets us up for success in 2020. To do so, we must allow recent changes to take shape,*



*consider new initiatives to overcome challenges, and make sure we are providing benefits and services that keep our members coming back year after year, whether it is their first time renewing or their 50th.*

*Change can be difficult for organizations such as ours, particularly with a structured decision-making process and highly engaged and tenured volunteer leadership. Many of our processes were built for a time when paper and the post office were required for USMS membership and event registration, instant communication tools were not the norm, and expectations from consumers were lower. So, innovation for the future health of USMS may require change to some of our longstanding processes, adjustment in our approach to the business guardrails in our rule book, shifts in the technology we use and how we use it, updates to our marketing and branding, and transition in how we administer and structure the business side of Masters Swimming.*

*What won't change are the daily interactions enjoyed at pools with teammates, coaches, and competitors; the health benefits realized through a regular swimming routine; the motivation provided by USMS events; or the need for passionate volunteers to help operate events, support members and programs locally, and provide perspective and input on how USMS can best engage with the numerous segments of USMS's membership.*

*As we look to the future, a key ingredient of our success will be the ability of volunteers and staff to work as a cohesive team to clearly promote USMS and build value in our offerings. On behalf of the USMS National Office, we look forward to continuing to work together with each of you to provide the best possible swimming experiences for our members.*

---

This excerpt remains as relevant today as it was a year ago. We continue to innovate. We continue to press forward with initiatives developed out of strategic planning, evaluate their results, and adjust accordingly. We have focused on strategies to provide more flexible membership options, increase access to events for fitness swimmers, and build a [new plan to attract more open water events and swimmers to USMS](#). We have expanded on current partnerships and built new ones. And we have evaluated changes in our approach to membership fees that create the desired flexibility in membership offerings (i.e. [the unified fee concept](#)). Change in process and structure continues to be a necessary element, as we continue to build a strong partnership between staff and volunteers to provide the best possible membership value for our members.

We are beginning to see encouraging signs of growth from our strategies that are yet to be fully implemented. Compared to 2018, membership has increased the past four months and five of the last six. The digital transformation, while only halfway complete, is already showing returns through many of the initiatives like the digital trial membership form and [Club Finder](#). (More details on those, among others, are provided below.) Coaches and Clubs are beginning to see more direct contact from interested swimmers through improved USMS digital marketing. The [Gold Club](#) program is helping us determine the best allocation of marketing resources so we can track our success. And the [USMS National Championship pool events](#) are either breaking records or are close (Spring 2018 – 2,376, Summer 2019 – 1,386, [CCS 2019](#) – 1,863). And we are more effectively engaging with USMS members who haven't previously participated in events through the [SmartyPants Vitamins USMS Fitness Series](#) and our recent [partnership with Swim.com](#) to provide a more modern swim tracking application.

But there is much work to be done. The digital transformation still has many new features to develop and current functions to refine. The future of the [USMS online community](#) (i.e. transition of forums, improved workout delivery, member account self-management, etc.) is in the late stages of



planning and implementation. The [integration with Swim.com](#) has launched, but there are many more fitness, achievement tracking and motivational functions to be released. Over the next several months we are transitioning to a new email platform that will help with member engagement, campaign automation and allow members more personalization of the types of communication they wish to receive. We need to better engage with our first-year members to improve retention beyond their first year (currently only 50% of first-year members renew).

Technology continues to be a focus given the ubiquitous and efficient methods of communication and automation available. But it cannot be viewed in a silo. The digital components of the strategy must align with the local and human elements of USMS in order to provide the best experiences possible.

During the 2019 annual meeting, you'll have the opportunity to hear more about the tools and initiatives we are refining to support USMS Club marketing efforts. You'll also learn more about the efforts of the Volunteer Task Force in building volunteer roles and structure for the future. The desired outcome is for each USMS delegate to have a better understanding of our strategic vision; how technology complements our staff and volunteer resources, nationally and locally, to provide the best possible membership experience; and how each of us fit into the vision, regardless of which USMS hat(s) we wear.

If you haven't reviewed the [USMS Strategic Plan](#) recently, here is a [simple infographic overview](#) that'll help as you peruse the following updates and plans for 2020.

## Membership Marketing and Benefit Strategies

### Clubs

Many of you experienced the updated club registration process when registering your club or workout group for 2019. This expanded registration process is critical to the success of the integrated marketing strategy that has been developed and implemented over the last several years. The Club Registration Form now collects detailed information that allows us to present better information to members and potential members, communicate information to the accurate club contact(s), capture information about the coach(es) and ALTS instructor(s) who are a part of the club, display badging on the club profiles, collect accurate facility location(s) to make searching for clubs and geo-targeted marketing campaigns easier, and gather other data that allows us to market clubs in our various campaigns accurately.

Nearly 235 USMS Clubs have achieved the [Gold Club designation](#), an initiative that is tracked through the new registration process. Gold Clubs have USMS-certified coaches, participate in at least one of the [SmartyPants Vitamins USMS Fitness Series events](#), include USMS branding and registration links on their digital platforms, offer a free trial and join in the Try Masters Swimming Week campaign. Every swimmer on these clubs is a registered USMS member, and these clubs receive additional benefits given their integration into our core marketing campaigns throughout the year.

Perhaps the most important measurement pinpointed from this initiative is that Gold Clubs have reached the same levels of membership to date as in 2018, while non-gold clubs to date



have reached 94% of last year's membership. That difference represents nearly 1200 members or 2% of the total USMS membership. Continuing to grow the number of Gold Clubs is a goal and expanding on the value and benefits these clubs receive will be a consideration for the future.

To further support USMS clubs and future members, we built a digital contact form into Club Finder to connect swimmers directly with coaches or club contacts. This information helps clubs communicate and prepare in advance for visiting swimmers and potential new members.

During House of Delegates Session 5, you will have an opportunity to learn more about the tools and integrations that are built around the new club registration process, how these tools feed into annual marketing strategies that drive swimmers to registered clubs, and how LMSC's can provide support it.

## **Swimmers:**

### **Membership Marketing Database/Membership Survey**

From strictly a marketing perspective, one of the most exciting developments of the digital transformation thus far is the new database of potential swimmers that we are beginning to build. Previously, the data that was available to market USMS membership was limited to former members, paper trial forms, and spreadsheets of one-event registrants. The latter two were not received in a timely manner for marketing purposes and required manual data entry to be useful.

We moved the trial membership form online, have data capture tools throughout the website (including a better idea of the type of content and benefits in which a potential member may be interested), and are working (with event registration partners) to gather one-event participate data in a timely manner. This data will be used in continued automated marketing campaigns.

A membership-wide survey was sent in August to help understand how different types of members view and use different types of benefits (this will be compared to past survey data to see how the membership has changed as well). The survey is also being used as a research tool to see how we can best implement our 2020 Olympic campaign. Increasing the size of the database, understanding how our members are interacting with USMS, and refining our strategies will lead to an increase in first time members.

### **Try Masters Swimming Week**

This year's Try Masters Swimming Week had new marketing materials available: social graphics, templates for club response emails, club website text, and local press releases, mailed boxes of goodies to clubs that signed up, posters, flyers, and infographics. It also saw the addition of email notifications to club contacts when a [digital trial membership form](#) was completed, added focus on Gold Clubs since we know they offer a free trial and are participating in [Try Masters Swimming Week](#), and the ability to track how many swimmers filled out the digital trial membership form. We added nearly 3,000 potential members to the



database, connected them directly with coaches and clubs, heard and saw numerous success stories from across the county, and generated 150 new members. Results from this year indicate that additional touchpoints are needed during the campaign from the LMSC or Club level to overcome the 'intimidation factor' for these potential Masters swimmers (i.e. trial participants need specific detail on what to expect, when to be at the pool, who to look for on deck, etc.) We'll continue this campaign into 2020 with adjustments to make it the most successful TMSW yet.

## **SmartyPants Vitamins USMS Fitness Series**

The Fitness Series continues to be successful while evolving in its second year. It has proven to be an asset for many coaches to engage with their swimmers, an opportunity for individual swimmers to participate in an event with the larger USMS community and an opportunity to raise funds for the USMS Swimming Save Lives Foundation. In 2019, we added the option to sign up for all three events at the start of the year. This led to over 500 'bundled' registrations. At the request of coaches and the Fitness Committee, we also allowed nonmembers to participate. Nonmembers paid \$5 more than members, creating a member value, and the additional benefit of adding those nonmembers to the marketing database.

The 2019 Summer Fitness Challenge had the highest level of participation since the inaugural challenge in February 2018. This is an integral part of the annual campaign to attract new swimmers and engage with members, particularly those who may not participate or have access to other USMS events.

## **Swim.com**

In July, we launched the beta version of the Swim.com integration with the USMS Fitness Logs (FLOGS). The FLOGS and Go the Distance program have historically been valuable motivational and tracking tools for members. But the number of users has been declining in recent years as calls for a more user and mobile friendly interface have increased (i.e., "We need an app."). The level of expertise and resources necessary to build a custom USMS fitness tracking app, to include integration with wearables such as the Apple watch, and to then continue updates and support, wasn't a feasible path for USMS. Fortunately, one of our largest partners, Spiraledge (the parent of Swimoutlet.com), owns a leading swim tracking application. We built on that relationship to integrate our two systems to provide our members greater flexibility and functionality. This project is still in its early stages, so stay tuned for more exciting updates such as tracking for Fitness Series events, new challenges, and open water tracking in the future. You can learn more about the [partnership with Swim.com](#) and [how to link your My USMS and Swim.com accounts](#) on [usms.org](#).

## **College Club**

[College Club Swimming](#) continues to grow, as does our advisory and support role. With nearly 5,500 swimmers on 155 Clubs, these swimmers represent the next generation of USMS members. We are continuing to build relationships through the USMS-CCS Bridge Membership, connection with local events and LMSCs in their area, and event support. Lastly,



FINIS, a current USMS partner, expanded its partnership to include becoming the title partner of the 2019 FINIS College Club Swimming Championships.

## Other National Office Updates

### Partnerships

Despite not continuing our relationship with longstanding partner Speedo, our partnership and events department has secured six new partnership in recent months. After a year of discussion, USA Swimming and USMS have agreed to work together to expand the reach of our partnership sales efforts. Through that relationship, USMS has secured agreements with Marriott, Toyota, Golden Road Brewing, and Streamline Brands, totaling nearly \$90k in annual revenue. The Race Club, owned and operated by Gary Hall Sr., is a new partner offering USMS members free content for two months and ongoing discounts on technique content and clinics. The final new partner is Insurance Office of America, and more information on them is immediately following. And current partner FINIS expanded its agreement by becoming the title sponsor of the FINIS College Club Swimming National Championships.

### Risk Management

Over the past 18 months, the National Office has been reviewing the broader insurance and risk management marketplace to ensure USMS is properly covered and at the appropriate cost. That research determined that our rates are in line with the market but also led to a unique proposal from Insurance Office of America, one of the risk management partners we met during the process. IOA offered similar rates to our previous provider with the following added benefits:

- A participant accident claims portal, allowing USMS to have real time knowledge on progress on any claims, a service that was not available with our prior partners.
- IOA is an official USMS partner and their investment is effectively reducing our insurance costs.
- IOA is providing a new member benefit in the form of an insurance marketplace. The USMS Marketplace will be customized and will incorporate other USMS partners. (USA Swimming has implemented a similar portal for their members.)
- Enhanced customer service surrounding the program/facility certificates of insurance. This should minimize the amount of USMS staff time involved and ensure we are closing holes in the coverage of our clubs and the facilities they utilize.



## Looking Forward

### Open Water Strategy Task Force

The chairs and vice chairs of the Open Water and Long Distance Committees, and the VP of Programs, worked in partnership with Jay Eckert to research and build a list of 10 recommendations to reset USMS Open Water Strategy. They made great progress to establish a plan for 2019 and have identified topics for further consideration. The financial resources required to support this plan are included in the [2020 Business Plan Budget Memo, Draft Budget](#) and details of the [Open Water Strategy](#) can be reviewed on [usms.org](http://usms.org).

### USMS Digital Community

Implementation has begun on the new USMS community. This new platform will incorporate USMS discussion (i.e., forums) with a more user-friendly interface; new account self-management tools; and fitness, event, and achievement tracking (i.e., badging of accomplishments), among other features being considered. The community will also allow USMS members to select the types of communication they would like to receive USMS. Like all our technology projects, the initial version won't have every feature included, but we expect it to be an improved membership experience from the start, with new functions rolled out over time.

### Online Workouts

The online workouts we currently offer are stored in our discussion forums and are not utilized as much as they should be. The workouts are great pieces of content and a powerful membership benefit. We plan on making these workouts easier to find on the website, providing more search capabilities to find the workout that best fits you, and potentially customizable based on skill level.

### LMSC Websites:

The [New Mexico LMSC](#) and the [North Dakota LMSC](#) have taken part in the beta version of the LMSC website template. These sites are hosted through the [usms.org](http://usms.org) platform and are free to LMSC that wish to use the template. There is minimal customization available as the standardized template is easily scalable to any LMSC that wishes to participate. The template incorporates most features and information that LMSCs are offering through their sites. After reviewing all of the LMSC sites, it became clear than many are duplicating data that is available in the USMS database. This template provides automation as it relates to club listing, event calendars, results and LMSC officers. And the template allows for adding newsletters and limited content updates throughout the year. The New Mexico and North Dakota sites have been up and running for several weeks and we are ready to open this up to other LMSCs that are interested in saving on the cost of hosting and the time of managing their own website. Email [volunteer@usmastersswimming.org](mailto:volunteer@usmastersswimming.org) if you are interested in learning more.



## 50th Anniversary

We have exciting plans to celebrate the 50th anniversary of USMS throughout 2020. Spring Nationals in San Antonio will be our signature event, with plans for upgraded hospitality, special events, and appearances from many that were instrumental in the early years of USMS, and there may be a few surprise guests (hint: Olympic swimmers). Also being discussed are a travelling roadshow created by the Masters International Swimming Hall of Fame that will be at major swimming events throughout the year, special 50th anniversary content in each issue of *SWIMMER* magazine and on usms.org and our social media channels, along with fundraising opportunities for the USMS Swimming Saves Lives Foundation.

## Unified Fee

The concept of unified USMS Membership fees has been batted around USMS volunteer circles for at least a decade. Ideas like automatic renewal of membership, multi-year memberships, various types of membership, allowing clubs to renew their swimmers in bulk, and/or the opportunity to include USMS Membership in club dues have all been discussed and are worthy of consideration. Those benefits, along with others, have one common barrier: our current national + LMSC fee structure. While some benefits may have a path forward through creative workarounds, unifying USMS membership fees opens the door to flexibility this organization doesn't currently have. You may review the [USMS Unified Membership Fee Memo](#) on the [USMS Annual Meeting webpage](#) for more information.

---

With noted major projects completed (e.g., risk management partner change, 2020 strategy and budget preparations), the National Office will be turning our attention to continued implementation of ongoing projects, executing a great 50th anniversary celebration, and 2020 marketing strategy, while driving new strategic initiatives forward (e.g., open water). None of this is possible without the dedicated and committed USMS volunteers throughout the country. The staff and I recognize the time you set aside from family, personal, and professional responsibilities to support Masters Swimming. We stand prepared to support your efforts, gather input, and communicate USMS strategies regularly, and answer any questions you may have along the way.

Thank you for all you do for USMS.