

2010 U.S. Masters Swimming Annual Convention
Rob Butcher, Executive Director
Convention Address
September 16, 2010

Two years ago, USMS was operating as a “virtual” organization.

With the help of several long time staff members, Tracy Grilli, Jim Matysek, Mel Goldstein, and Margaret Bayless, the board of directors, executive committee and committees day to day operated the organization. And then an Executive Director gets hired. It was, and in many ways, continues to be a transition time for all of us.

At the 2008 Convention, a four-year Action Plan was presented and adopted by you, the House of Delegates. The Action Plan at its soul called for and would require a partnership. The partnership would be between the volunteers that govern and the professional staff that would carry out the operations.

This Action Plan provided us road map in continuing to fulfill our mission and meet our objectives. In broad speak, the Action Plan called for a number of items. Some we’ve fully met and some continue to be in progress:

- 1) Centralization and establishment of a headquarters
- 2) Invest in the member experience
- 3) Invest in Infrastructure Development
- 4) Investing in Coach and Club Education Programs such as Masters Certification
- 5) Rebranding our identity to be inclusive of fitness swimmers, open water swimmers, triathletes and competitive swimmers
- 6) And Marketing of our brand by joining the 21st Century digital and social media age with exciting video coverage of events, clubs and volunteers

A four-year budget pro-forma was presented to support our Action Plan. The pro-forma indicated we would tap into our reserves in Year 1 and Year 2 to meet our goals. Well, the good news on our financials is fourfold;

- 1) Some of the costs have not been as much as expected
- 2) We’ve had better cumulative membership increases than projected
- 3) The Finance Committee, board and staff have exercised fiscal discipline
- 4) And we’ve added to our overall net reserves. Our reserve fund today stands at its highest mark ever of nearly \$2 million dollars

Let’s now take a look at a video recap of the past year.... All of you deserve a round of applause for these accomplishments.

So... where then do we see opportunity?

- I. Membership has increased nearly 15% the last two years but our non-renewal rate of nearly 36% is both a problem and an opportunity. In 2009, 2010 and 2011 combined, we will turn over our entire membership with 60,000 non-renewing members.

Membership is nearly 75% of USMS revenue and in most cases 99% of LMSC revenue. Membership renewal and membership growth affects all of us. To learn why our members renew and why they do not, this winter we will administer a comprehensive survey.

While there are many hypotheses as to what we can do about membership retention and membership growth, the survey will enlighten us on what the renewing and non-renewing membership thinks and perceives.

We must all be prepared to confront the findings. They may reveal that we need to make changes to our business, changes that could go against some of our traditions and reshape how we govern and operate.

But if membership retention and membership growth is important, than we will need to make these changes so they are in the best interest of our member wishes.

- II. We are successfully integrated more technology into key areas of our business such as online membership registration and event results.

Our End-to-End Event Management Task Force has been carefully studying and making recommendations for how we further automate our business such as event sanctioning. The efficiency of operation and information to be gleaned and applied from automation are of significant benefit to USMS.

On sanctions, if we dig just a little deeper, for the most part we own the adult competitive pool space. But sanctioning of open water events is a different story.

Consider the following:

- In 1999, there were roughly 220 domestic open water events
- In 2009, there are roughly 850 domestic open water events, an increase of 300%
- In 2009, an estimated 183,000 individuals will participate in domestic open water events

The average age of the open water swimmer is 36. This is our demographic

You see it everyday at your local programs.

More open water swimmers and triathletes looking for swimming help. And we are the only organization with the coaching and program structure to help them.

While we do sanction an estimated 20 to 30% of the open water events, the larger number of open water events go unsanctioned or get a turnkey sanction from USA Triathlon.

The Open Water Committee has the mission of growing grass roots open water. They recommend creation of a consistent and mainstream application process. This is a position we should support.

III. We all desire and value communication.

It is provided to LMSC leaders and clubs.

But what about workout groups? How many of are there? Where are they? How do we communicate with them? How do we serve them and provide education opportunities?

At the moment, it's a guessing game.

Let me be clear on this topic, our actions and intention is to provide service to every location that offers a USMS program.

It is incumbent upon us to develop a method of communication and information exchange with workout groups that can benefit the membership.

IV. Our Endowment Fund in its current form has served its purpose. The time has come for us to develop our Foundation.

Members have proven over the last 10-years they will support our charitable efforts when provided a purposeful mission and asked. This year we received our largest ever contribution, \$100,000. The board just this weekend supported a redefined mission for our Foundation:

“We will focus our resources on the vital lifesaving and lifetime benefits of swimming.

We provide needed funding to reduce drowning rates in the United States and to lead a nation-wide curative fitness and well-being initiative that is swimming central.

In short, Swimming Saves Lives!”

We will be requesting and seek your support of an allocation of resources to serve this mission.

And finally, one word of caution.

USMS is no longer a sleeping giant.

We are visible to many.

Our actions are watched.

In today’s media and Internet hungry world, even the most innocent of traditions could be questioned.

Our litmus test for safeguards is the protection of our brand.

In closing, thank you to our board of directors. In particular, thank you to:

- Betsy Durrant
- Jeanne Ensign
- Michael Moore
- Meg Smath
- Laura Winslow
- and Jerry Clark

These 6 board members have reached their term limit. We greatly appreciate your service and leadership. We know your hearts are still with USMS and you will find other ways to be involved.

Lastly, thank you to our extraordinary staff. You are a passionate group and you “bring it” everyday. You are committed to our mission. It is an honor and a privilege to serve with you.

Thank you.