

Relaunching your u3a



u3as have been sharing ideas with each other and coming up with resources to help the movement retain and recruit members during this time and beyond. This series hosts these resources in a toolkit for u3a members to use when needed. Credit: Jean Hogg

Preparing for the future – celebrate and relaunch

Introduction

The purpose of the guide is to suggest how you can relaunch your u3a. Having a launch event, perhaps many years after your u3a first began, might be a good way of telling the world that you are getting back to normal activity after Covid-19. You will no doubt want to celebrate with your current members, but this guide is more about relaunching to attract some new members.

At some point, face to face meetings are going to become both safe and permitted. Whether your u3a has kept in touch with members and held some virtual meetings or has found it difficult to do much at all, we need to mark this occasion. Many u3as will already have had fantastic ideas about your future activity, but the hope is that this guide will give ALL u3as some inspiration. Please can those of you with good ideas share them as widely as possible.

We will be collecting feedback to create an improved version for use by u3as. Your experiences of using the guide are of vital importance. Please email your suggestions for improvement to feedback@u3a.org.uk

How to relaunch

If you have ever been involved in the start of a new u3a you will know about the buzz of excitement and the ideas that abound – the ‘we could’ and ‘what if’ suggestions. So – could you create that feeling in your members now? How can you let your community know about your u3a?

- There are plenty of ideas, from the traditional Open Morning, with displays by Interest Groups, ‘pop up’ stalls in shopping areas and at community events, and information leaflets in Libraries. You may also think about performances by music groups, such as ukulele, recorder, choirs etc. How about a walk around the neighbourhood – wearing branded clothing?
- The important thing is to use this as a wonderful opportunity for publicity and for attracting new members. Sadly, some people will have lost their jobs in the pandemic or had to take retirement earlier than they had planned. They need your u3a and could bring new energy, enthusiasm and ideas.
- Many Regions now have a Public Relations Advisor who can help. Use as many outlets as possible, including social media, local radio and newspapers, your website and, of course, posters and leaflets.
- If finances are tight you can still use free outlets, such as local/community news sheets, websites and radio. If you can afford it, publicity resources, such as tri-fold leaflets can be obtained and personalised at the u3a brand centre.
- Involve your group convenors and members. You may want to create a sub-committee to work on this.
- Some u3as have sent a survey to members asking how they feel about u3a but also for suggestions, including about new interest groups and events.
- The Recruitment Working Group has developed a number of ‘[How to...](#)’ guides that could be helpful.

Sharing your ideas

- Raise this idea at your next Network or cluster meeting. Have a brain storming session!
- Join the [u3a closed Facebook group ‘Keeping in Touch’](#) (if you have not already). Share your ideas and learn about others.
- You may want to time your relaunch to coincide with 2 June, u3a Day. (If we are lucky and are allowed out by then!) There is a [closed Facebook group for u3a Day](#) where members share their ideas for the day, and there are resources and ideas available on the [u3a day page](#) of the national website.

Let us all make 2021 the year that our membership increases nationwide and sees many more Third Agers enjoy the benefits, enjoyment and interest of u3a!

Transforming your Website into a Shop Window



u3as have been sharing ideas with each other and coming up with resources to help the movement retain and recruit members during this time and beyond. This series hosts the new resources (toolkit) for u3a members to use when needed. Credit: Paul Martinez, with help from Chepstow u3a

Introduction

This guide is intended for use by your committee and any sub-committee or team that you set up to recruit new members. It is not aimed at the technical side of your website. Its purpose is to suggest how you can transform your website by taking simple steps:

1. Define your website purpose and audience
2. Accentuate the positive
3. Sell your offer
4. Have a “wholistic” approach (not a spelling mistake)
5. Improve your visitor experience.

Because it's not technical, we hope this guide will be of use to all u3as (unless you have already transformed your website) whether you are using Site Builder, WordPress, Wild apricot or anything else.

We are all feeling our way here and welcome your feedback on how to improve this guide. Please send your ideas for improvement to feedback@u3a.org.uk

Website purpose and audience

Broadly speaking your website will have three different types of user:

- Visitors and prospective members
- Existing members who are looking for new opportunities
- Existing members who are looking for news, updates or information

To transform your website you need to put it in a selling mode for visitors and for retaining existing members looking for new opportunities. For these two groups, the primary purpose of the website will be to project your offer in the most attractive way possible and make it easy for someone to sign up for and take advantage of what you are offering.

That doesn't mean that the news and information for existing members will be ignored. But when you think about it, they will almost certainly be able to access news, information and updates in other ways: through your newsletter, from communications from your committee and from interest groups to which they belong. This means that your website does not need to have information updates as its primary goal.

Accentuate the positive!!!

This has three exclamation marks because a surprising number of u3a websites have the following message on their website, often in a very prominent position:

“Because of the Pandemic all meetings are suspended until further notice.”

A variation of this message is: “In “normal” times our monthly General Meeting gives you the opportunity to meet new friends..... and join Interest Groups. (but currently suspended during the Covid outbreak)”

Both examples imply that their audience is current members looking for information.

They are inappropriate if the primary purpose of your website is to sell your u3a to prospective members.

At the risk of stating the obvious, accentuating the positive means focussing on and emphasizing all that your u3a currently offers – your newsletter; your online, face-to-face and hybrid interest groups which ARE functioning; the new friendships, activities and experiences you offer; not to forget your online monthly meeting. This is particularly important on your home and welcome pages.

There are many u3a websites which do this, including [Chepstow u3a](#).

On their welcome page, the positive messages are included and embodied in:

- The buttons on top of the page which include New Normal and Virtual u3a
- The Live Life to the Full banner heading
- The encouraging message which follows emphasizing the benefits of joining the u3a
- The active and attractive photographs which can be blown up to full size
- The list of interest groups.

The bottom of the welcome page contains more attractive images and stirring endorsements from some new members. The page concludes with four key links. Three of the links are to parts of the Chepstow offer which might be particularly attractive to prospective members: newsletter, Tuesday live fortnightly virtual meetings, and social events. The fourth key link is tothe membership page.

We don't say that everybody should copy Chepstow, but their example shows how you can accentuate the positive and squeeze out the negative.

Sell your offer

At the risk of echoing the saying: 'Grandmothers, pick up those eggs and suck!', here follow some thoughts about selling. We all know at least in principle that we sell benefits and not features. But what does this mean in practice and how do you combine selling benefits with essential descriptive information? Our suggestions are:

- Sell the benefits of everything you do – newsletter, friendship, activities, technical support, welcome arrangements, etc
- Balance benefits and information. Give as much prominence to what people get out of joining your online meetings or a particular interest group (what this interest group will do for you), as to the necessary information to describe the meeting or group.
- Arrange pages so that the things most interesting to prospective new members (and indeed members) come first and put Admin, Beacon at the end
- Once you've got it, flaunt it! Your website address should be on every piece of promotional material: newsletter, welcome booklet, posters, flyers, banners, every Facebook post
- Don't put too much detailed information about groups in the main body of the website; leave that for the Group pages.
- Try to sell a flavour of what it means to be a member
- People respond more to images than text. Do the images you are using on your website underscore and reinforce the benefits you are promoting? When you are choosing pictures for the website try to cover as many genres as possible, showing the range of activities. Do you show a wide range of ages? Are you promoting both strenuous activities and more cerebral activities?
- People respond even more to video than to images: do you have any links to very short video clips you may have produced yourself? Are there very short u3a clips produced by others on YouTube to which you want to post links?

There is a separate guide in the Recruitment Toolkit about [making your interest group offer irresistible as well](#).

Have a “wholistic” approach

I know that’s not how you spell holistic, but I am making a different point. If you are selling benefits, you probably need an holistic approach combining image, text, style etc. The point here is that you need to consider your website as a whole.

Your website may have dozens, scores or even hundreds of pages. Most of your pages will probably be devoted to your interest groups. Now, you will almost certainly have updated some key pages and added a few more on the Covid situation, how to enrol online, risk assessment advice etc, but what have you done about all your interest group pages?

If you google the name of your town and say, the term gardening or gardening group, chances are that Google will turn up a link to your u3a gardening group on its first page of results. The more specialised your group, the more likely it will appear on the first page of your Google results. If I google Gedling bonsai, there are six links on the first page of my Google results and ironically, they are listed above the local bonsai nursery.

This is both good and bad news. It’s good in the sense that it shows you how relatively easily prospective new members can find you when they are seeking to pursue an interest, even though they may never have heard of u3a in general and your u3a in particular. The bad news is that you will probably need to inspire, persuade, enjoin, and enthuse your interest group convenors to update their web page(s) with text and images that are current and which sell their interest group.

If you do not enable current group convenors to manage their own interest group pages, now is the opportunity to provide access and give any necessary training – reminding them that someone within their group could take on this responsibility if they cannot/do not want to do it themselves.

Improve your visitor experience

The most important thing to improve visitor experience is to work on the look and ease of use of the website. You have probably done quite a lot to make your website interesting and enjoyable if you have followed some of the suggestions above.

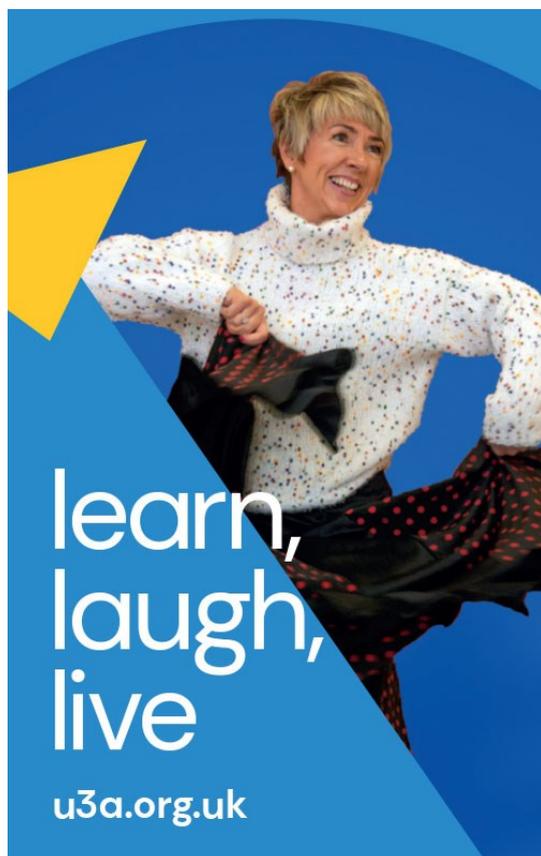
Final check questions:

- Does your website do what you want it to?
- Do the links all work?
- Is your website content attractive and up to date?
- Do all your contact points work?

And finally: Getting a positive result

From your point of view, this will be the enrolment of a new member or at least an enquiry about joining your u3a. Apart from the obvious need to have a well-signposted means of enrolling online or of enquiring about membership, the way you respond to first contacts is probably as critical to a positive result as the content and design of your website.

Pop-up Displays for Recruitment



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Introduction

This guide describes how you set up a small portable (pop-up) display at a venue for recruiting members. This guide is for use once social distancing is over!

Your experiences of using this guide are of vital importance. Please send your suggestions for improvement to feedback@u3a.org.uk.

When would you use a pop-up display?

- After a Committee-led period of assessment of readiness for recruitment.
- After a reconnaissance visit to the venue for risk assessment and liaison with the organisers or managers of the event/venue.
- After a poster advertising when you will be there has been up for at least a week.
- After a post advertising the event has been shared on local community social media.
- And at a time which maximises the benefit gained for the time invested.

How to create your pop-up display

- Buy branded merchandise from National u3a Office, e.g. a cover for a display table with a u3a logo, pull up lightweight banners and/or feather banners, giveaway items like pens, bookmarks, leaflets etc, and create posters to pre-advertise your presence. Consider investing in branded clothing/sashes.
- Obtain a suitable collapsible table and possibly a display board.
- Include old copies of Third Age Matters, note pads, membership forms, contact details of membership secretary and u3a website.

Tips

- Set up in high-footfall areas appropriate to the u3a age group, such as supermarkets, clinics, retirement events, libraries etc.
- Display the pop-up at the monthly speaker meeting for members to see so that they become aware of recruitment and may offer suggestions and help – e.g. enlist crafters to embellish the pop up to increase its vibrancy.
- Have a social gathering for those who will staff the pop-up display, so they know each other and can plan how to transport things, erect the pop-up and (very important) interact with the public
- Appoint a coordinator who stores the pop up, keeps the schedule of events and dates/times, and sets up and issues a rota for the event of member volunteers
- Have at least one experienced, well-informed & sociable committee member at each pop-up event.
- Develop a crib sheet for reference, with a list of interest groups, contact details, venues, dates of monthly meetings with speakers, coffee mornings and all things relevant for a new member.
- Notify the members when and where the pop-ups will be, encourage them to come along to support, and encourage them to advertise it.
- After each event have a thank you, reward meeting with complimentary coffee and cake or glass of something to assess its success and make adjustments for the next event, if necessary.
- Keep holding these pop-up events, make them fun and enlist as much help as possible.



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Introduction

2.5 million people use Facebook every month and it's acknowledged by many reputable sources as the world's most cost-effective way of advertising digitally. It can be an easy, cheap and effective way of recruiting new u3a members. Your budget can be as little as £10. You will have to pay for advertising on Facebook, but you are in control of how much that payment will be.

This guide explains how to create Facebook Ads, and gives a case study from a u3a group that used them successfully.

The advantage of Facebook Ads is that you can see how many people (with Facebook accounts) your advert will reach before you decide to spend any money. You can literally see what you will get for your budget, and Facebook will not exceed that budget. Facebook will send your advert to a targeted audience that you have defined, and let you know how many people respond. How many responses you get depends on the quality of your advert.

Section 1 explains how to set up and send a Facebook ad.

Section 2 describes how to design a Facebook ad.

This guide is our first draft. We will be collecting feedback in order to create an improved version for use by u3as. Your experiences of using the guide are of vital importance. Please send your suggestions for improvement to Jean Jackson at feedback@u3a.org.uk.

You could literally write a book on why and how to promote something via Facebook, and many people have. But the best way of finding out what you can do is to search Facebook help, because Facebook is constantly evolving and updating its advice.

Types of Facebook ads: things to think about

Some types of Facebook ads work only on mobile devices; if you choose those that work on all options, you will reach more people.

Adverts with movement attract MUCH more attention, so although image ads are Ok, video or slideshow ads attract much more interest: video dominates the internet.

The easiest way to create a quick video is to film a clip of your team in action, using a phone. You'll need their permission to use their image. These days you may have to gather individuals' videos taken on phones. Make sure they hold their phones horizontally, not vertically, when filming.

If you don't want to create video, create a slideshow from your images or photographs. Slideshow ads use much less bandwidth than video so load well for people with slow internet connections. You can create slideshows via Google docs or PowerPoint, etc.

When you create a Facebook Ad, make it very clear what action you want people to take. Ideally, offer more than one option about how they can respond, e.g. "send for more details", and offer the opportunity to attend an event or meeting.

P.S. Make sure the ad's "on-brand", i.e. use your u3a logo, new colours etc.

Planning your promotional campaign

STEP 1: Define what you want to achieve, quantify it if you can, be specific.

e.g. Recruit at least 10 more u3a members – OK

The more specific you are, the easier it is to plan appropriate action. It makes it easier to think about your audience and what might appeal to them, e.g. if you have spaces in your gardening group, then you might focus your efforts on that and change your aim to

Recruit at least 10 more members for our Gardening group – BETTER

(we can start a second group if we over-recruit)

STEP 2: Work out what your offer is: what makes it attractive?

Gardening Group benefits – what’s most attractive to new members?

- Cheap weekly meetings – £2/session; central location, easy to get to
 - Garden visits, Gardening talks
 - Exchange plants; plant sales
 - Is part of a local group (u3a) with more interest groups that you can join
- if you have related groups e.g. like a “Garden visits Group” or “National Trust Outings” then mention them – your advert needs to be as attractive as possible.

STEP 3: Who is your target audience? Age, location, interests? You have to specify the characteristics of the people who will receive your Facebook advert.

Age range: You need to define the range of ages of the Facebook users to whom you want your advert to be sent.

Location: within driving distance of Our Town – 10 miles? (you may need to know the nearby villages’ or suburbs’ names) Increase this to widen your audience.

Interests: look at the options that Facebook offers under the Interests tab.

STEP 4 Set your budget and schedule

Facebook is great at maximising your investment and controlling spend for you. You set a budget (£10 is a likely minimum – try it and see what returns you get) and Facebook will keep you to it. You can adjust it daily if you want to.

BUT bear in mind that Facebook charges your account each time an ad is delivered to an account, not necessarily looked at. Some of the accounts may be dormant.

Keep an eye on your ad as it’s running: if it’s not getting the results you’d like, you may want to edit it or upload a new ad. How much you spend is entirely a function of how many people to whom you are advertising, with the characteristics you have defined.

A step-by-step guide to creating and sending your Facebook ad

NOTE: You need to be a Facebook Admin to set up the ads. You’ll need to use Facebook Ads Manager, so if you get stuck, that’s the help to look for.

Find “Manage Ads” in the drop-down menu on your Facebook account.

Where that is can vary according to how your page or group is set up, so look around your Facebook account menu. Usually you press the Plus sign next to your picture to bring up the Create menu – you’ll see Ad there. Create either an Automated ad (Section 1 of this doc) or a new ad (Section 2)

SECTION 1: Step by Step: create your Facebook ad

Automated Ads

The easiest way of creating an effective ad campaign on Facebook is via Automated Ads. Facebook will ask you questions and offer you options. This guide helps you think through in advance what your responses may be to the many questions asked.

Click Automated Ads, answer the questions, and most of the work is done for you – although you still need to decide what your ad’s message is.

Creating a Facebook Ad

Facebook recommends that you use a Page, or a post on a Page, as an advert.

You might want to set up a special Page, linked to your Facebook Group, to attract people who you want to respond to your advert. It might be a Page for a special event. Bear in mind that Pages are open – anyone can see them and join in what happens there, whereas your Group may be closed to anyone who isn’t a u3a member.

Information on designing your Facebook ad is in Section 2.

Facebook shows you how your ad might look, based on a Page.

You choose the Audience for your ad. To the right, you see the options offered by Facebook. In this case – and the projection will vary depending on your group – it says if you run an ad for 5 days and spend £10, then this is your likely reach: 510-1500 people. You can even request a free call with a Facebook Marketing Expert to find out more – see “Request Call.”

Click on **Create New**.

You can see the options to Create your audience.

The primary options are location and age group. Don’t be offended that Facebook doesn’t recognise age beyond 65 – at the moment this is a standard marketing age-category. In future the over 65s may be subdivided by age group, but not yet. You search for information that’s recorded in Facebook. As you make your choices, look at the audience size indicator on the right of the screen, showing your potential reach.

NOTE: Targeting is a blunt tool: many Facebook accounts are dormant, yet your ad will still be sent to them if they meet your criteria. From 1000 people you might get a 5% response, i.e. from 50, then maybe 15 will follow through. You need big numbers.

Be realistic about the response you expect. It’s likely to be 2%-5% of the total.

Detailed targeting

As you can see, there are other options but let’s keep it simple and work through interests. You can include people based on the interests that they recorded on their Facebook account. The more targeted your offer, the more likely it is to succeed.

“Join our u3a gardening club” is a more targeted offer than “join our u3a”, as you can then target exactly the kind of people whose interests match what that group offers. You’ll end up with a list. It may be too big or too small – play with your location, age group, the range of interests, until you succeed. Bear in mind you need big numbers. Facebook will advise you what to do.

Paying for Ads

Once you’re happy with your ad, pay for it using a credit card. You will receive automatic reports on the ad’s progress.

SECTION 2: Design a Facebook ad

N.B. For extensive advice about Facebook ads, endorsed by Facebook, go to Wordstream. This Guide is an overview and does not describe all the many options.

Let’s assume you want to create a brand-new ad, perhaps on a brand-new Page.

Ad: the basics

- It needs to be visually appealing, clear, with a clear message about what to do.
- It must have a photo or a slideshow; maybe a video clip. Because images and slideshows use less bandwidth, they load faster so may be a better choice.
- The image size limit is about 12MB, although video can be 2GB.
- Video should be MP4 or MOV. Images should be about 1200×628 pixels, with little or no overlaid text – it slows the download. Aspect ratio is widescreen.
-

If you can, test your advert before you post it: show it to people, ask them to criticise it so that it can be improved. Would they respond to it? Why not?

Facebook offers several options to help you create your advert. First, choose a format.

1. Carousel: an advert with 2 or more images or videos that move round
2. Single image: up to 6 variations of your advert can use the same 1 image
3. Single video: an advert with one video
4. Slideshow: a looping video advert with up to 10 images that never stop
5. Canvas: combines images and videos

Once you’ve chosen your format, add your content. It needs to say clearly what you’re offering, what the benefits are (why bother?) and what to do next. Don’t just invite people to a meeting – that might be daunting; also offer “send for more details”, which requires less commitment. Tell them why Gardening Group is great – and needs them!

Place your order – and afterwards

Once your Ad is ready, submit it by clicking “Place Order” at the bottom right of the page. You pay via credit card. You get an email from Facebook once it’s live. Results should begin to arrive within 3 days. Normally you run your ad for at least 5 days.

Monitor it – you should have some recipients that you KNOW, who can give feedback. You may be one of them yourself. If you’re not getting results, experiment – edit your ad or replace it. Facebook will send you charts showing how your ad is performing: see the following case study.

Think about what could be improved: was timing a factor? There are best times to post an advert: try what works best for you. Good luck!

CASE STUDY: Using Facebook Ads

“In 2018, Sherburn and Villages u3a was celebrating its 10th anniversary, a landmark we wanted to share with the community, and so in good u3a tradition we set up a working party to think about what to do and how to do it.

We always have an open day in October, but that year decided to go for a bigger better open day on a Sunday where we could welcome anyone and everyone no matter how old they were and no matter whether they were working or not – to get the message about the u3a across to the whole community. We showcased our groups, had workshops & entertainment: everyone is a potential member.

We’d never used Facebook ads before, but the pricing made it worth investigating. Some of the best features are the ways in which you can see exactly what you are getting for your money, who is seeing your ads and what response you are getting.

It’s also quite intuitive. As you create an event or a post, you see a little box saying, “boost event” “or “boost post” and if you click though, all options become available.

The reports are clear too: you can see exactly how much you’re spending and who’s seeing your ad. Here’s one of the charts that showed us what we got for our money.

As you can see, the reports showed that the majority of people seeing the ad were over 50, although it was our intention to get the message out to everyone, and at £34 to reach 2,232 people we were happy with the result.

After the event we were simply delighted with the attendance and the general success of the day. It was very gratifying then to see that our membership shot up and surprisingly for us, took us into the top reporting u3as for new members in 2019.

It can't be said that Facebook ads were the only the key to our success, but they certainly were a part of it.

We asked everyone how they had heard of us at our event. One lady said she had seen it everywhere, and that was great! We think we blitzed the area so that one way or another, the message got out. We marshalled the troops and got out there posting leaflets through letterboxes and handing them out at local events, putting up posters and hanging banners. These are all things which require a great deal of person power. Facebook ads, by comparison, are easy and take very little effort and of course you can do it from your armchair.

All you need a Facebook page and a budget and a few minutes and away you go. We all know that the number of Facebook users is growing: in August 2020 Facebook reported 43.54 million people used the service in the UK and a huge proportion of those people fall into the bracket we would like to come along and join us. So why not investigate and give it a go as part of your recruitment campaign?"

Margaret Fiddes
Sherburn and Villages u3a
(printed with their permission.)