

THACS Newsletter Readers Survey

Report and Recommendations

Ray Keppler November 2009

1. INTRODUCTION

The *THACS Newsletter Reader Survey* form (Appendix A) was distributed to all members with the newsletter in September 2009 to solicit members' views on our newsletter and website. The detailed results are shown in *Results, Newsletter Comments, Website Comments* and *General Comments* (appendices B-E).

The purpose of this report is to summarise the results and to stimulate debate about what we should do in response to these results. To start the process of deciding upon a suitable course of action, I have made a series of recommendations for discussion at committee meetings.

2. LEVEL OF RESPONSE

The *THACS Newsletter Reader Survey form* was distributed to the 129 households that account for the 191 members. We received 44 replies, giving a response rate of 34%. This is high for this type of survey and certainly means that we can treat the results as truly representative of the views of our members.

Unfortunately, not all of the forms were completed fully. One form only had comments (which is why *Results* only shows 43 answers to newsletter questions) and eight of the forms had nothing entered against the questions about the website (which is why *Results* only shows 36 answers to website questions).

3. ABOUT THE NEWSLETTER

3.1 Readership

The articles most read were Forthcoming Events, Chairman's Introduction and Recent Events. The least read articles were Children's Corner and Jokes.

Each newsletter was read by an average of 1.63 people. If this ratio holds for all 129 households, then the total readership would be 210 (just above our membership).

3.2 Content Preferences

The most important articles were Forthcoming Events, Chairman's Introduction and Recent Events. Gardening Tips, Recipes and Photography Tips were closely bunched together as the next most important and their importance scores were high enough to warrant their continued inclusion. The least important articles were Children's Corner and Jokes, with only 21% of respondents rating them as Very High or High importance. Even the adverts were regarded as being more important, with 44% of respondents rating them as Very High or High importance.

Recommendation 01. Discontinue publishing Children's Corner and Jokes.

Recommendation 02. Continue publishing Gardening Tips, Recipes and Photography Tips, with at least one type of tip in each newsletter.

3.3 Layout and Design

The readability of the newsletter was rated highly, with 98% of respondents rating it Very Good or Good. However, the Visual Appeal was not rated so highly:- 77% of respondents rated it as Very Good or Good, but the remaining 23% rated it as Poor. There is scope for improvement here, but we need to be careful about changes to the appearance of the newsletter and we should only make changes we believe will improve the already-high rating.

3.4 Frequency

93% of respondents were satisfied with the current practise of publishing four newsletters each year, in March, May, July and September.

Recommendation 03. We should not change the publication schedule.

3.5 Delivery

51% (22 households) of respondents would like the newsletter delivered electronically by email, rather than paper copy by post / distributor. Of those 22 households, 10 currently receive their newsletter by post, so a switch to email would save some postage costs.

Recommendation 04. We should distribute the newsletters by email (instead of paper) to those households who have indicated their agreement to this, starting with the next newsletter (due February / March 2010). The electronic copies of the newsletter should be sent in PDF format, to ensure the preservation of the layout and format.

Recommendation 05. Email distribution of the newsletters should be done by the Newsletter Editor (Ray), based on the master distribution lists maintained by the Membership Administrator (Pat).

Recommendation 06. Members should be offered the option of switching between electronic and paper copies at any time, without financial penalty.

3.5 Improvements

We asked readers for suggestions of how can we improve the newsletter. As you can see from the comments (see *Newsletter Comments*), we did receive some suggestions but it is worth noting that quite a few readers commented on how much they like the newsletter in its present form. Consequently, I think that we need to be careful when introducing significant changes by explaining what we are doing in the newsletter and inviting comments.

Recommendation 07. The Chairman's Introduction should include mention of newly-introduced changes and invite comment.

Please read the comments and form your own opinion about possible improvements. My interpretation is reflected in the following two recommendations.

Recommendation 08. We should make the following changes to the content:-

- a) Include names, role, telephone and email addresses for the Newsletter Editor (and the four elected officers?) in every newsletter.
- b) Include readers' letters and comments.
- c) Occasionally include appropriate longer articles written by guest writers, such as advice to exhibitors at the THACS shows.

Recommendation 09. We should make the following changes to the design, layout and style:-

- a) Make the adverts less dominating. We have already agreed to reduce the volume of adverts for 2010. In addition, the adverts need to be more carefully positioned, perhaps with none on the front page and more space between adverts and text.
- b) Stop using Showcard Gothic font for the word THACS when it appears in the text (but continue to use it in titles).
- c) Ensure that the headings for Future Events are large, bold, and include the event title, time, date and location.
- d) Add more visual appeal in the form of graphics and pictures. Perhaps a new THACS logo, seasonal symbols, black & white photographs etc.

4. ABOUT THE WEBSITE

4.1 Usage

Usage of the THACS web site is unfortunately low. Only 12 households indicated that they use it at all and this only represents 27% of the 44 respondents. Of the few people who do use it, only 25% use it frequently, with the remaining 75% using it occasionally or rarely.

Most of the users view the photographs, but few download the newsletters or event forms.

4.2 Usefulness

67% of website users said that they thought the website was an interesting way of keeping up with THACS events. The remaining 33% did not find the website useful for that. Their comments indicate that this may be due to their preference for “push” news (i.e. newsletter delivered to them) rather than “pull” news (i.e. having to visit the website).

4.3 Improvements

We asked readers for suggestions of how can we improve the website. As you can see from the comments (see *Website Comments*), we did not receive any specific suggestions. Awareness and usage of the website is low and most of our members seem to be under the impression that there is nothing on the website than they can get from the newsletters. We need to decide if we have the will and resources to do anything about this. If we do, then we could implement these recommendations:-

Recommendation 10. We should increase awareness of the THACS website amongst members and non-members, by additional publicity in the Newsletter, Parish News and at THACS events.

Recommendation 11. We should develop the website to provide more than the content of newsletters and pictures from the shows. Perhaps it could contain a reference section containing previously-published articles on Gardening Tips, Photography Tips and Recipes, with links to other websites for further information.

5. GENERAL COMMENTS

As you can see from the comments (see *General Comments*), we received several lovely complements and expressions of appreciation from some of our members and these are heartening and encouraging.

However, several readers commented adversely on the high level of repetition of text between the THACS newsletter and the Parish News, so I think that we should re-consider our use of the Parish News.

Recommendation 12. We should make the following changes to the content of our articles in the Parish News:-

- a) aim the articles more at non-members, by increasing the focus on future events
- b) stop publishing reports of previous events
- c) sometimes include text about THACS to raise awareness of what we do.

6. CONCLUSION

The response level and the nature of the comments clearly show that THACS is well-supported and the work of the committee is appreciated. The newsletter is well-regarded and basically sound. However, there is scope for improving the content and appearance of the newsletters, increasing the awareness and usefulness of the web site and making more appropriate use of our space in the Parish News.

The observations and recommendations in this report address these issues and should be used as the starting point for deciding upon the best course of action.

APPENDICES

- A. NEWSLETTER SURVEY FORM**
- B. RESULTS**
- C. NEWSLETTER COMMENTS**
- D. WEBSITE COMMENTS**
- E. GENERAL COMMENTS**