



INTERNATIONAL
CORRESPONDENCE CHESS
FEDERATION

ICCF Marketing Report



Russell Sherwood
August 2018

ICCF Marketing

Introduction

I would like to start by paying tribute to my predecessors GM Leonardo Ljubičić and SIM Andrew Dearnley who have taken the ICCF Marketing function onwards and built a solid foundation to be able to advance from. I am certain Leonardo would have had a much longer tenure, sadly cut short by ill health and other commitments.

I have spent my initial time “in office” considering our position within world chess, our resources, the marketing director brief and likely trends to determine what I believe the path forward to be for marketing ICCF and the tasks necessary to achieve our desired outcomes.

We have suffered from the rapid changeover in personnel so one of my first tasks is to determine and nominate a Deputy Marketing Director to help secure the vision for ICCF.

In addition, in recent years the Marketing Committee has become defunct, a situation I intend to remedy in the near future. Considering the breadth of activities, the most effective composition of this group, beyond ex-officio members is a combination of individuals with a mix of backgrounds and representative of progressive national federations, both in size, strength and recruitment model.

Alongside this a key objective is to build effective working relationships and positioning for the directorate alongside other members of the EB and MB.

General Strategy

In general, I believe the Marketing Strategy for ICCF rests on four legs: Recruitment, Retention, Production and Placement. In addition, promoting ICCF overlaps completely with promoting Correspondence Chess in general, which brings a particular set of challenges.

Recruitment - we need players, these players come through the National Federations, but our reach is that we need to aid in the generation of the initial interest which is then directed into and processed by National Federation. At no time should ICCF be placing itself to recruit directly!

Retention - Once we have brought players into the system we need to work to keep them! This, I believe, has two components which need to be addressed: Player Engagement and Player Experience. Thus this leg is about keeping the player interested in CC over the long term.

Production - Here we need to maintain and develop the ICCF brand - in terms of what we stand for and our and how we portray this to the wider chess world. This includes developing a consistent and attractive styling within our documentation.

Placement - This is what many would see as traditional Marketing brief within ICCF - the development of suitable partnership and event sponsorship relationships with external bodies.

Recruitment

Recruitment of players to Correspondence Chess is essential for our ongoing existence. Whilst the overall trend continues downwards the curve is flattening and now is the time to look to reverse this. The main challenge that exists is to place ICCF and CC in relevant terms to the modern chess player. This I believe comes from working in several areas:

Developing a Why for CC.

Almost all mainstream chess commentary published about CC is negative. Much of this is due to common “engine-jockey” misconception and to challenge a key activity is to develop a USP for Modern Correspondence Chess in general and ICCF in particular (as compared to other options).

Leveraging the different player segments within ICCF

ICCF contains an ever-changing mix of players of different strengths and motivations. These can be approximately divided into segments, although this is an oversimplification as a single player can be part of many different segments. However, those different segments tend to have similar or common motivations for playing CC.

The challenge is to determine these different segments, their motivations and ensure that our offerings (and preferably those of the National Federations) meet those offerings! One size does not fit all and proposals to negatively affect specific segments are, from a marketing perspective, damaging to ICCF.

Taking rating segments as an example, we have excellent offerings for higher rated players, however, for those rated below a certain threshold, our offering is potentially less attractive. This year’s Congress proposals contain a number of interesting enhancements to our tournament offerings. I believe we need to go beyond this and review our entire tournament range to make it more attractive to players of all segments, something I intend the Marketing Committee to do, for discussion with the WTD, NTTC and TTC over the coming year.

As an example, three potential innovations when considering the Tournament offerings, based on rating segments, could be:

- A international Team Tournament , sitting below the Olympiad and Memorial Team Tournaments, with an upper rating limit of perhaps 2000 Elo
- A new lower division for the Champions League with an upper rating limit, to allow a much more competitive environment for the weakest pool of teams
- A closed “World Cup” style event with an upper rating limit of around 2100

It should be made clear that rating is not the only basis for segmentation: Postal Play, Veterans, 960 and rapid play events are all example of other segments.

CC’s Gordian Knots

Modern Correspondence Chess has a number of difficult issues, including increasing draw percentage, Dead Man’s Defense and similar. The challenge is to continue working towards finding solutions, either partial or full of these issues. Substantial progress has been made on a number of fronts, such as TriBi which partially address a number of this kind of issue, so there is no reason to believe this work should not continue to find new and innovative ideas.

Why are these marketing issues? In simple terms these tend to be matters which put players off Correspondence Chess or bring disillusionment, thus affecting the long-term retention of players, which is a marketing issue!

Player Recruitment

By addressing a number of the issues mentioned above we should be in a position to open up our potential player pool. To enable this to be converted into players we need to work in several areas:

Advertising

We need to continue to advertise Correspondence Chess (and ICCF) both in terms of paid for advertising and well-positioned articles.

Three matters do need to be clarified for paid for advertising:

- The advertising copy needs to be cognizant that the potential player is to be driven to the National Federation as we are not a stand-alone server, something that recent efforts have not made clear.
- This advertising is essential to support smaller national federations, who do not have the budget to promote Correspondence Chess in this manner.
- It is worth communicating to national federations when and where advertising is taking place, so potential joint projects can be considered.

In terms of articles - much is to be done in terms of generating more content for Correspondence Chess. I will cover this in more depth in the Player Retention - Engagement section but in principle, a key part of promoting Correspondence Chess more effectively is generating more content in the wider chess media. Currently, the majority of articles tend to be of a similar nature and do not promote Correspondence Chess in a positive manner.

Member Federation Recruitment

In addition to driving potential new players to our current federations, there remains a clear need is to work with the Zonal Directors to develop new member federations. These are a number of avenues to work on including:

Retention

Engagement

I believe a key component in keeping a typical player interested in Correspondence Chess is the generation of sufficient content of interest. CC has almost no coverage in the wider chess media and much of what is seen is negative in manner. On this basis we need to strive to engage with Correspondence Chess players to make CC interesting beyond simply playing. In a common vernacular the aim is to create a “buzz”!:

Amicus Magazine/Newsletter

A key component of engaging with our current membership is the resurrection of a regular, electronically published Newsletter/Magazine. The frequency and content will be determined by available editorial resources.

Initially, the Editorial Group will be formed from volunteers obtained by solicitation from both National Federations and direct to all registered players. Recruitment of this group will begin in July 2018.

There are a number of successful examples of National Federation Newsletter and website content and these will be utilized to guide in the direction of Amicus.

From my experience as a Correspondence Chess Editor, it is obvious that generating a mix of interesting content will be initially an uphill struggle, but I expect to be able to engage with a number of national federation editors to be able to improve this. The expectation is that we should be able to publish on a quarterly basis and various ICCF officials and officers will be looped in as this will allow us to display our upcoming tournament offerings in a coherent and attractive manner.

ICCF Hall of Fame

This excellent innovation should continue to be showcased within ICCF. A number of excellent candidates exist for induction in 2018.

ICCF Website

From an engagement point of view, we have a good website and server, although as identified in the Services Director's report we have a necessary ongoing program of development to deliver features required both players and administrators. From a marketing point of view, the main necessity is to drive more posting via the main feed. It is my aim to drive to increase the frequency of posting - with Tournament updates being a particular sought-after area. From our typical 2-3 posts per month, we should be looking for around 2-3 posts per week.

ICCF Introduction

We have an opportunity to improve our engagement with the player from the point of registration (and confirmation with by national federation). This can be done via a number of documents designed to guide the player through their first ICCF events, including "What happens now", "What events are on offer", "Rules FAQ's" and documents of a similar nature.

The visual guide introduced was a step in the right direction, but this is aimed to go much further in helping the player settle into ICCF play. This is not designed to replace the role the National Federation has here but to supplement it.

Social Media

If we wish to attract new players to Correspondence Chess we must utilize the most appropriate methods, which currently includes Social Media. We already have a presence, but the move will be to increase our utilization:

Facebook

Here a choice exists, to either utilize the current unofficial Facebook group or set up a new one. Provided agreement with the current Admins/Moderators can be reached then the unofficial group is a simpler way forward. The aim will be to mirror many of our wider announcements to Facebook and stimulate positive CC discussion.

For this to be effective then (1) a pool of moderators needs to be put in place to ensure inappropriate materials are removed and (2) Clear Guidelines on what can/will be covered need to be developed.

Twitter

For this medium we aim to simply mirror our website announcements (which is what currently happens)

Forum

This is an area of consideration for player engagement which needs an extended period of review. Should the Facebook group be successful then the requirement for a forum becomes moot, however should the forum become desirable then the key prerequisite is the recruitment of a pool of moderators to prevent the area becoming "trolled". A review of the potential will be undertaken.

YouTube

From discussion with a number of colleagues in similar roles in OTB organizations, the use of YouTube and similar methods is an area of expansion for most chess federations. Efforts will be made to explore and experiment in this area, through the development of basic introductory videos.

Experience

The other side of the coin to improving our engagement with players we need to work to improve the player experience. That is the way that the player interacts with ICCF (of course the position of the National Federation in the process needs to be given due respect!)

A number of excellent developments have taken place or are planned, and my initial objective is to review the player experience for number of the segments detailed above and thence to input to the Server development priorities.

In addition to the development work consideration needs to be given to the player journey*****

A number of Engagement activities also spill over into this area.

Production

A number of activities mentioned throughout this document require the creation of an ICCF style, including attractive templates and a common grammatical style. With more than one version of English involved and many 2nd or 3rd language speakers involved this may not be the simple task it many initially appear.

Therefore, the primary tasks will be to create a style guide for ICCF officials (and anyone wishing to use the ICCF apparatus). As grammar is an area with more than one interpretation this should be done in a soft guidelines format rather than a prescriptive set of rules.

Following this a set of base templates will be designed and disseminated.

This will take place alongside the development of multiple documents!

Placement

We have a small number of partnership agreements, which all need to be reviewed. A full review needs to take place including partnership/sponsorship model, potential partners and possible ICCF opportunities.

The positioning of the ICCF games database needs to be also considered.

Key Activities

1. Select and propose candidate for Deputy Marketing Director
2. Select and contact candidates for Marketing Committee
3. Determination of ICCF/CC - USP and development of supporting documentation.
4. Determination of plan for sharing USP with NF and wider audience.
5. Determine and Agree ICCF partnership/sponsorship criteria
6. Determine potential ICCF partners and areas for partnership
7. Negotiation of partnership opportunities.
8. Determine working player segments
9. Review of ICCF offering from a player stream perspective.
10. Consider impact and build player segments concept into other marketing initiatives (tailoring)
11. Determine Gordian knot list of CC issues
12. Determine advertising plan for 2018-2019
13. Determine wider Chess Media targets for promoting CC
14. Determine article writing plan
15. Form NMF Working Group
16. Determine MF Target List
17. Determine required new MF materials.
18. Recruit Amicus Working Group
19. Determine Amicus style and methodology
20. Determine Amicus publishing timeline
21. Determine ICCF Introduction Documents
22. Author ICCF Introduction Documents
23. Discuss Facebook Group Moderation with Admins
24. Determine Facebook Group Rules
25. Review Forum Potential.
26. Review YouTube/Twitch potential for ICCF Promotion
27. ICCF Main Feed Posting
28. Develop ICCF Style Guide
29. Develop ICCF Templates
30. Consider positioning of ICCF Games database.