

The State of the American Antique Motorcycle Community



**July 21, 2011
Mansfield, Ohio**

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Introduction: In July, 2010, members of the board of directors of the Vintage Japanese Motorcycle Club organized an informal meeting of representatives of mid-sized organizations in the United States dedicated to antique motorcycling. The purpose of the meeting was to determine to what extent there is common ground among the organizations. This was carried out through an informal discussion moderated by Hal Johnson, President of the VJMC, and Jan Ringnalda, President of the International CBX Owners Association.

There appeared to be a consensus among participants that there are a number of common concerns and interests, and that the opportunity to meet and discuss had been useful. It was suggested that the process be continued on an annual basis, so long as interest among the organizations still exists. Roger Smith, Director of the VJMC and Vice President of the Antique Motorcycle Foundation, and Ed Youngblood, Director of the Antique Motorcycle Foundation, undertook planning for the 2011 meeting. To facilitate a more focused discussion, they distributed a questionnaire addressing the strength, weakness, opportunity, and threats within the participating organizations. Ed Youngblood tabulated and analyzed the questionnaires, and submitted draft report for discussion purposes. Following discussion by the group, the report was finalized and is presented herein.

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Those who participated in the discussion at Mansfield, Ohio on July 21 included representatives of the American Historic Racing Motorcycle Association, the Antique Motorcycle Club of America, the Antique Motorcycle Foundation, the International CBX Owners Association, the Penton Owners Group, the Spanish Motorcycle Owners Group, and the Vintage Japanese Motorcycle Club. Representatives of the National Motorcycle Museum and Moto Retro Illustrated also participated in the discussion.

Part One:
**The State of the American Antique
Motorcycle Community**

Tabulated Responses

Introduction: The following are the responses submitted by the five organizations that participated in a self-assessment process conducted among mid-sized organizations in the United States dedicated to antique motorcycling.

Organization A: 700 members, declining but at an insignificant rate. Revenue growing, but at an insignificant rate. Average age estimated to be 55 years.

Organization B: 3,200 members, holding steady. Revenue growing at an insignificant rate. Average age estimated to be 50 years.

Organization C: 437 members, Revenue and membership are holding steady. Average age estimated to be 55 years.

Organization D: 780 members, Revenue growing at an insignificant rate; membership holding steady. Average age known to be 50 plus years.

Organization E: 5,000 plus members, Both revenue and membership are growing at a significant rate. Average age estimated to be 55 years.

Strength

1. What is your organization's greatest strength?

A. A few devoted club officers.

B. The size of our market: the vintage motorcycle community as a whole. Huge numbers, Rabid enthusiasm.

C. Having a nucleus that includes many of the folks who were actively involved in the creation, refinement, sale, service and racing of our brand.

D. A large following for our specific type (model) of motorcycle.

E. Membership is a diverse group with a wide range of talents.

2. Optionally, please list one to three additional strengths.

A. Strong following of brand owners.

B. 1: Magazine is first rate. Is the greatest benefit we offer. Most members join to receive the magazine. 2: Incorporated as a 501C7: enables us to have by-laws for governance, requires us to meet once per year and puts in place a skeleton of an organization. 3: Have excellent resources in the marketplace; knowledgeable mechanics, excellent historians, and vintage market experts.

C. Multi-generational involvement within numerous families; we have fun and enjoy being together.

D. NR

E. Keystone events which energize the membership.

Weakness

3. What is your organization's greatest weakness?

A. Lack of new younger people willing to serve on the board of directors.

B. Organization structure is nowhere near optimal. End result of current governance model is entrenched leadership, turf-minded directors, and a completely dysfunctional and toxic atmosphere from which to govern.

C. Have not developed a system to bring along our future leaders.

D. Bickering among different "sections."

E. Lack of forward thinking and planning. Reactive rather than pro-active.

4. Optionally, please list one to three additional weaknesses.

A. Ineffectual board members.

A. Ineffectual board members.

B. 1: Complete inability of leadership to plan, innovate, or adapt to the marketplace. Result is stagnate membership and organization that does not live up to its potential.

2: Insurance: Club has significant exposure to liability and current board is unable to recognize this fact. Head-in-the-sand attitude toward the problem. 3: Entrenched leadership marginalizes any incoming board members who bring talent or expertise, resulting in deep factions among board members.

C. Getting old.

D. International group; tough to organize things on a worldwide basis. Is mostly USA focused.

E. Lack of volunteers.

Opportunity

5. What is your organization's greatest current opportunity?

A. To continue to promote vintage motorcycling.

B. Collaboration with other vintage motorcycle organizations. Potential for collaboration is immeasurable in things such as membership retention, resource funding, and planned giving.

C. We have a wonderful web site that is open to anyone.

D. Unify membership and offer resources for owners.

E. Landing additional keystone events.

6. Optionally, please list one to three additional current opportunities.

- A. NR
- B. 1. Local membership development based on active chapters and locally organized events. 2. A national event structure which will capitalize on national marketing efforts.
- C. We sponsor the AHRMA cross-country series. We display at the international motorcycle show in Cleveland.
- D. Discount offerings. Meetings.
- E. Updating technology; Younger members being elected to board and key positions.

7. What is the greatest threat your organization is facing?

- A. New people to take over leadership of the organization.
- B. Complete implosion of club not beyond reason due to toxicity of the board environment.
- C. Aging of folks who have a nostalgic connection to our brand.
- D. Ex-directors with a paranoid issue.
- E. Economy and government regulations.

8. Optionally, please list one to three additional threats.

- A. NR
- B. Inability of the board to resolve the most simple issues, make plans for the future, or even recognize and address its dysfunctionality.
- C. NR
- D. That members become frustrated and not bother.
- E. Rising costs; Apathy.

Governance

9. Has your organization ever conducted a SWOT analysis or an internal management audit?

- A. No.
- B. No.
- C. No.
- D. No.
- E. No.

10. Does your organization have a formal strategic planning process?

- A. No.
- B. No.
- C. No.
- D. No.
- E. No.

11. Does your organization have a plan or program to identify, recruit, and train future leaders?

- A. No.
- B. No.
- C. No.
- D. No.
- E. No.

12. Are paid employees of your organization allowed to hold voting positions on your governing board?

- A. No.
- B. Yes (this may be changing soon)
- C. Does not apply.
- D. No.
- E. No.

13. Does your organization have a formal leadership succession process?

- A. No.
- B. Yes.
- C. No.
- D. No.
- E. No.

14. Does your organization have term limits for directors and officers?

- A. No.
- B. No.
- C. No.
- D. Yes.
- E. No.

15. Does your organization have a procedure for removing directors?

- A. No
- B. No.
- C. Yes.
- D. Yes.
- E. Yes.

16. Does your organization have a clear mission statement?

- A. Yes.
- B. Yes.
- C. Yes.
- D. Yes.
- E. Yes.

Communication

17. Which of the following communication vehicles do you employ:

- A. Magazine (6 per year); Web Site.
- B. Magazine (6 per year); Web Site; Periodic e-mail blasts.
- C. Newsletter (quarterly); Web Site; Web Site Forum.
- D. Magazine (3 a year); Web Site; Web Site Forum.
- E. Magazine (monthly); Web Site; Web Site Forum; Periodic e-mail blasts.

18. Of the vehicles listed above, which is the most effective from management's point of view?

- A. Magazine – Very popular.
- B. Magazine.
- C. Web Site Message Board.
- D. Magazine.
- E. Magazine.

19. Of the vehicles listed above, which is the most popular from the membership's point of view?

- A. NR.
- B. Magazine.
- C. Web Site.
- D. Magazine.
- E. Magazine.

Part Two: The State of the American Antique Motorcycle Community

Commentary and Analysis

Introduction: The following is a commentary and summary analysis concerning the state of the American Antique Motorcycle Community based on the results of questionnaires returned by mid-sized organizations that participated in a voluntary survey conducted in the Spring of 2011.

Rate of Return: Nine questionnaires were mailed out. Six were returned. One reported a membership of 40,000 and publication of a semi-monthly magazine. It was disqualified because there is not an antique or vintage motorcycle organization in America that would meet this description. Thus, with tabulation based on five valid returned questionnaires, the rate of return was 55.6 percent.

Usefulness of Results: Although the questionnaire does not lend itself to scientific statistical analysis, the results can be assumed to provide useful insights into the community because two of the three larger organizations (representing more than 8,000 members combined) responded. The five organizations responding represent a total of 10,117 members, which is a significant segment (probably more than a third) of the organized American antique and vintage motorcycle community.

Commonality: Other than membership numbers, no organization stood out as distinctly different from the others, except that one appears to have a highly dysfunctional governance process. All reported their average membership age from 50 to 55 years, and with some difference in nuance, all were similar in their problems, concerns, and opportunities.

General Community Health: Given the current protracted economic recession in America, reports of membership retention and financial health are surprisingly positive. Three said their membership is holding steady. One reported a decline, but described it as "insignificant." And one—the largest of the group—reported growth at a significant rate. None reported a decline in revenue. One said revenue is holding steady. Three said revenue is growing, but at an insignificant rate. And one—again the largest of the group—reported significant revenue growth. Whether it can be attributed to demographic composition, member loyalty and morale, or some other factor, all organizations participating in the study seem to be impervious to the negative economic environment.

Perceived Strength and Weakness: Respondents see their strength in the quality, depth, and enthusiasm of their members (and potential members). However, there is a clear and common concern about the lack of members willing to ascend to leadership roles or take on responsibility as volunteers. There is concern about attracting younger members into the organizations. Some complain of ineffectual leaders or dysfunctionality of their board.

Opportunities and Threats: There does not appear to be a common thread in perceived opportunities. They differ, depending on the circumstances of the club. The concern about future leaders is identified by two of the organizations as a major threat. Two feel threatened by the behavior of specific leaders or the board as a whole. Concern is expressed about the economy, although it does not appear to have impacted the community so far.

Governance: While development of leadership—current and future—seems to be a preoccupying concern within the community, no organization appears to have addressed it in any formal, systematic way. For example, none carries out organizational audits, none maintains a strategic planning process, and none has a system to identify, recruit, and train future leaders. Only one reports a formal leadership succession process. Fortunately, every organization has a clear mission statement, which is the fundamental basis for all organizational development.

Communication: All respondents communicate through print and digital media. Most see their magazine as their most effective communications tool, while one extols its web site forum. Their magazine is seen as a popular membership benefit by a majority of the respondents. One can conclude that among the five responding organizations—and probably all antique motorcycle organizations—the dissemination of information is a very is a very, or is their most important function.

Conclusions: It is encouraging that antique motorcycle organizations in America do not appear to be subject to many external threats. One respondent expressed concern about government regulation and the state of the economy, but so far the operating environment does not seem to have had an impact on membership and revenue. There is a common concern about an old and aging membership. It should be pointed out, however, that this is not unique to the antique and vintage motorcycle community. The average age of all motorcyclists in America is 49, and over the last ten years that figure has advanced nine years—from 40 to 49! This does not bode well for any aspect of American motorcycling in the future. Sadly, this may be a threat that none of us can do much about.

Perceived threats seem to be internal, related to recruiting leadership, quality of current leadership, and quality of governance. These are factors that organizations should be able to do something about through formal planning, training, and development of guidance manuals to encourage the use of best practices.

During discussion, an additional strength or opportunity was identified. All of the participants in the meeting were of an age to remember when motorcycling was widely vilified in the United States; when people who rode motorcycles were looked down on

and discriminated against. This situation has radically changed. Motorcycling as a whole is viewed much more favorably by the public and the press, and antique motorcycling is especially admired. With the great interest in old motorcycles as objects of art, following the 1998 breakthrough exhibit by the Guggenheim, with stories about great classic motorcycles in "high brow" publications, with popular television shows about collecting, preservation, and restoration; and with the welcoming of antique motorcycles into prestigious automobile concours events, today the antique motorcycle and motorcycle collecting are well regarded.

One participant in the meeting postulated that those interested in vintage and antique motorcycling in America are currently enjoying a "golden age," and that while there are worries about the future of the movement based on the age of its participants, at present the opportunities are rich and should be enjoyed to the fullest.