

## RECAP – by PSK – 4 Sep 2011 (Revised Version)

### CONSOLIDATED AGENDA FOR COMMUNICATIONS GROUP MEETING 3 SEPTEMBER 2011

#### PLEASE BRING A COPY OF THIS AGENDA TO OUR SATURDAY MEETING

The following items are numbered but are **in no particular order of priority**. We will establish our priority as we work through our lunch meeting:

**With one exception:** I would like to have each of us comment at the outset of our meeting about a profile of tasks and challenges we see for your offices. I've put our office descriptions from the ByLaws below in order to set the context for our comments about our offices:

#### **VP for Member Communications:**

To distribute electronically any bulk mailings or special messages or notices that may be of interest to the membership, to manage the internal communications of the club to its members, and to plan and coordinate club activities related to publicity and member records. The following appointed officers of Director rank with duties indicated shall be coordinated by the Vice President for Member Communications.

My agenda issue is: How can we best exploit the interaction among our four arenas of: Focal Points newsletter, VPS website, various Publicity initiatives, and records and contact with members coming from the Membership Director? What synergies are there in these four arenas that we can use to combine strengths?

Phil opened with his views about the goals he sees for the COM GROUP as an instrument to help grow both the level of participation of membership in VPS activities and the quality and diversity of the VPS experience.

In the course of our meeting,, Ceasar asked “What our goals are that should guide the efforts of the COM GROUP as it relates to the larger Board and membership?”

Phil responded to Ceasar’s good question that Phil’s opening comments about why the Bylaws revisions of officer responsibility were needed and fit into the statement that Phil made about the need to “grow” VPS in terms of quality and diversity (of interests and abilities in photography).

There was general agreement, as well, that all of us were committed to growing the QUALITY of VPS membership—that would involve raising the level of participation of all members and would include bringing in more young members and novice photographers—but that we were definitely not interested in simply getting an increase in membership much beyond the present level of 100-125 members.

Part of the interest that was expressed in raising the level of member participation was to encourage greater diversity in the types of photography and photographic art traditions that the club would represent and facilitate with our programs.

#### **EDITOR (Director) of the Newsletter:**

To collect articles from VPS Board members and the general membership, format them into the newsletter and distribute the newsletter electronically.

#### **WEBMASTER (Director of the Website):**

To develop, maintain, and operate an effective and professionally attractive online website in order to provide useful information to VPS members and to symbolize to photographic enthusiasts the high quality of VPS programs and member photographic activities. These duties include posting of award winner information in coordination with the Vice President for Competitions.

#### **PUBLICITY DIRECTOR:**

To plan, develop and execute a program of publicity directed toward the outside community in support of VPS goals, programs, and activities. It is expected that these activities will cover recruitment of new members, solicitation of support and establishment of networking initiatives that will enhance the financial and member base of VPS.

#### **MEMBERSHIP DIRECTOR:**

To plan, develop and execute a program of member database record-keeping, including initiatives designed to encourage maintenance of active membership participation in the activities of the club and efforts to welcome new members to the club. This officer will also be responsible for the creation and maintenance of the member Recognition Photographic Data Base. This officer will also be responsible to assure that VPS Privacy Policies are developed, promulgated and effectively maintained.

My email to the COM GROUP on Sep 2 said, in part: "I ask you Directors to consider "a profile of tasks and challenges we see for your offices", I would like you to think about how you might break apart some of your primary job tasks into some elements that volunteers might help you with.

Last Spring when I developed our new officer Bylaws revisions, I inserted the concept of a Support Network. The idea behind the Support Network is that we will try to attract more participation by our members as volunteers who would help our officers with their duties.

#### **COMMENTS BY DIRECTORS:**

Phil: I don't need volunteer help. My work is primarily with the COM GROUP officers and other Board members. I stand ready to serve as a volunteer to other officers if I can be a kind of utility infielder to support what they do. The one possible exception is in survey development—I need might need help if the load gets heavy from someone who is also as experienced as I am in survey research. I have one person in mind but I may not need help if the survey load is relatively minor.

Cesar: He will look into finding areas related to some repeated tasks—such as posting announcement messages to media outlets—that might be turned over to Support Network volunteers

Loma: She looks for help in taking over the operational work of building and maintaining the Member Imagebase (Mike has indicated he can help her in a substantive way)

Mike: His special concern is getting help in obtaining articles for the newsletter

David (Phil spoke for him in his absence—saying he is looking for facets of the website to safely turn over to volunteers—such as the Board Calendar that Phil is now maintaining on the website). In his Aug 29 email to us, David said: "So my vote is to develop somewhere somehow this membership directory. **My task is to analyze and document some options.** A goal of the directory process would be to minimize work for Loma. Also this can be developed in stages with pictures maybe the second stage??"

## OTHER AGENDA ITEMS:

1. WHAT DOES EACH COM GROUP DIRECTOR CONSIDER TO BE THE MOST PRESSING ISSUES CONFRONTING THEM IN THEIR AREA OF RESPONSIBILITY?

Cesar: Need to establish and execute contacts with media outlets to make VPS publicity announcements. Also need to develop a strategy of a publicity campaign for VPS, including a concrete proposal for the creation of a practical VPS intro photo course taught by VPS members—perhaps using the Forums Program—to attract potential new members to the club, especially younger people, from the Thoreau Middle School and larger community. Also: developing and fielding to members a good “2-Minute Elevator Speech” with an available VPS business card to promote the program at the retail level of contacts for each club member. Obtaining and possibly upgrading a flyer to promote VPS at our own meetings for guests and at such larger venues as Nature Visions and possible camera stores.

Mike: Getting articles in order to fill a well designed set of feature articles each month. Improving the “look” of the layout and pictures in each issue.

Loma: Maintaining an accurate and up-to-date member record base which can be expanded to include member images—and assuring an effective outreach to new members and lapsed members.

2. PRIVACY POLICY: Current policy statement on our member applications (**Do we need something more extensive??**)

“Membership records are maintained by the Membership Director. Periodically, the records are distributed to members as a spreadsheet. Note that VPS will not provide member information to persons or organizations outside the club. Members may opt to restrict distribution **to other members** of their personal information as follows. **Please check one of the two options below** which will govern distribution to other members of your records:

**INCLUDE** \_\_\_ my name, phone number, home and email addresses on distributed member lists.

**DO NOT INCLUDE** \_\_\_ my phone number, home and email addresses on distributed member lists.”

3. MEMBER IMAGE DATABASE: Our Bylaws have the following provision regarding the responsibilities of the Director of Membership: “To plan, develop and execute a program of member database record-keeping, including initiatives designed to encourage maintenance of active membership participation in the activities of the club and efforts to welcome new members to the club. This officer will also be responsible for the creation and maintenance of the member Recognition Photographic Data Base. This officer will also be responsible to assure that VPS Privacy Policies are developed, promulgated and effectively maintained.”

The Image Database is a big task. We have already implemented the Image Database for our 19 Board officers (with several images yet to be provided – but we are assured they are “On the way!”) The suggestion of Julie Cochran was that create a Facebook Group (which we have now done) and let the Group be the place where all member images can be accessed.

Thus far, the Facebook Group has not turned out to be a readily searchable solution. The idea of an Image Database is to use it as a tool whereby members can use their computers to browse names and pictures online of those who are voluntarily providing images – and thereby VPS members can get to know each other's names more readily.

What can we do to collect and display—in browse able manner—all member images and names so that we have a practical tool to get to know each other better?

Phil says: Perhaps Julie Cochran can give us a fuller sense of the capacity of Facebook to provide an integrated collection of member mugshot thumbnails that can be searched/browsed by name?

After further discussion at our Sep 3 meeting, Julie and Mike and Phil agreed that Facebook could not provide a searchable/browse-able imagebase for member pictures.

Mike Cochran had this to say:

I currently have a database ( MS Access) that is used to manage archived images. I don't think it would take that much effort to modify it for the club. In fact, if I understand it correctly, one could combine the membership database with the image database. HOWEVER if the goal is to add this database to the vps web site, then that will require some serious security discussions.

Also, Mike says:

I've been using and being abused ☺ by Access for quite a while. Since about 1998. It's quite the powerful tool for a stand-alone application.

Dave does safeport allow or have the ability to do MySQL?

I have at least 1 database (MySQL) set up on my site. I still haven't figured out how to get the schema, data and whatnot into it. THAT is going to require some research, phone calls and/or emails. I'll let you know what I find when I find it.

David Biehler had this to say:

I favor the database concept. They two basic options are

1. Keep it within the VPS using MS Access or Mysql or something similar, or

2. link to Facebook or Flickr or something similar.

So my vote is to develop somewhere somehow this membership directory. **My task is to analyze and document some options.** A goal of the directory process would be to minimize work for Loma. Also this can be developed in stages with pictures maybe the second stage??

I don't know what to say about someone who wants to be member of the club but feels uncomfortable sharing contact information. What I will say is that we should not let a very small minority drive the train. We (VPS) used to publish a membership list (as do many photo clubs) but one day there was one person who was contacted by another with a very innocent note

asking if they would like to have lunch or something. Nothing tawdry or obscene -- just friendly reaching out. I realize this is not match.com but come on! Anyhow the person complained and we haven't distributed a list since. The complainer is no longer a member but her legacy lives on. Actually the problem is solved with the 'Do not Publish' box on the membership form.

ANOTHER POINT WAS MADE THAT, IN ADDITION TO USING AN IMAGEBASE TO HELP MEMBERS GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER BETTER, we might try to provide more time at meetings for member socializing. The specific proposal was made that we start meetings at 7:00pm for socializing and that we start the substantive program at 7:30pm.

The concern was expressed by Loma that some members who work would find it very difficult to make a meeting that starts at 7:00pm. There seemed to be general agreement that despite the fact that some members could not arrive before 7:30, there would be positive benefits for those who are probably in the majority who could show up at 7:00pm. We agreed we would make a 7:00pm start as a recommendation to the Board.

Phil says: In a sense, we agreed that in making club policies, that "One size fits all" is not a good basis for making decisions. Instead, we should seek out arrangements and programs that can have broad appeal even if some members will not be able to participate due to lack of interest or due to time constraints. While we should never deny ANY MEMBER a fundamental feature of membership, a benefit of trying to not have minority concerns or limitations prevent policies that serve the majority will enhance our sense of diversity of club activities and programs. This idea of encouraging diversity of interests may also mean that the club may want to provide, within its limited resources, programs and opportunities for minorities of interest within the club. For example, if there is a community of interest in abstract photography or extreme photo-art based on heavy use of post-processing tools, maybe VPS should try to accommodate such interests.

#### 4. CAN VPS OFFER A COMMUNITY PHOTOGRAPHY COURSE TO ATTRACT NEW MEMBERS,

This was discussed in terms of the Ceasar proposal on p. 7 for a "Introduction to Photography Series for VPS"

5. SURVEY POLICY: Liz has expressed the desire to have surveys that are developed by VP for Member Communications be reviewed by the President before they can be implemented. Apparently her fear is that too many surveys will be sent out which will produce complaints from members.

Kronenberg's view is that surveys need to be used by officers and other club member to get insights into what members are interested in and what ways they seek to collaborate in doing the work of the club. Therefore, I propose the following policy as a way to encourage the use of surveys and to insure that they are not over-used.

Survey Policy: Surveys distributed to members must be sponsored by at least one VPS officer, must be reviewed for formatting and coordination by the VP for Member Communications, and must be sent for review and input by the President and First Vice President at least 4 days prior to distribution to any members. All surveys will be distributed to the general membership or

submember groups (according to the needs of the sponsoring officer) by the VP for Member Communications using SurveyMonkey. The VP for Member Communications will send the results and analysis to the sponsoring officer and relevant members soon after administration of the survey.

There was general agreement with this policy for surveys.

6. WHAT ISSUES SHOULD BE RAISED IN INITIAL GENERAL SURVEY OF MEMBERS TO START OFF THE YEAR AT VPS?

The initial general survey will be initiated soon after the first club meeting on Sep 7. It will attempt to gain insight into what (1) interests and priorities members have for VPS programs, (2) what new programs or offerings members seek, and (3) what problems or concerns members have about the way VPS operates and the programs it offers. The initial survey will attempt to incorporate input from both old members and new members drawing on the old and new member lists (so that members who were in VPS last year but have not yet renewed will have their issues reported in the survey).

7. USE OF SURVEYS BY OFFICERS TO HELP WITH PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT: The VP for Member Communications will be available to consult with and assist club officers develop surveys relevant to their program needs.

The primary customer (and sponsor) for the surveys will be officers who seek help in thinking about and making decisions concerning the programs for which they are responsible.

8. SWITCH OF BULKY DISTRIBUTION FROM MIKE TO PHIL with backup arrangements: This switch is already under development, with Phil as the primary distributor using a new email address (not the old address: [editor@vps-va.org](mailto:editor@vps-va.org)).

Phil says: The plan is to have Mike and David as backup distributors when Phil is on travel or otherwise unavailable. Phil is still working with Mike & David in preparing the backup procedures.

9. WHAT "FILTER" POLICY SHOULD GUIDE THE DISTRIBUTION OF BULKIES?

It is rumored that the current policy is: The newsletter Focal Points may not be used for any commercial messages, other than perhaps "For sale" and self-promotion statements/announcements by VPS members AND bulky messages forwarded to member by other members and by outside photo professionals who are within a year of presenting a service (speaker or judge) to VPS.

Question: Should we revise this policy in any manner?

There was general and strong agreement that current policy is essentially correct and that the newsletter should not be used for commercial messages by people from outside VPS membership; however, VPS members could advertise their own commercial-type programs or items for sale. But articles from non-members could not be primarily commercial messages—

although it is acceptable to contain a modest references in an article to commercial goods and services, including those that are self-dealing by the author of such article.

Mike asked that a list of Valid Commercial Vendors be established that he can use to vet articles and messages coming from non-members.

Phil suggests (on 4 Sep—this was not discussed but seems reasonable, at least to Phil) that the VP for Member Communications should review any non-member articles submitted to FOCAL POINTS to validate that they conform to this policy.

Phil also suggests (on 4 Sep) that bulky messages can continue to forward messages and promotions from non-members if the non-members are on a list of Valid Commercial Vendors that is certified by the VP for Member Communications .

10. WHAT CAN WE DO TO INCREASE MEMBER PARTICIPATION IN VPS FUNCTIONS—Culture of passive participation? We only attract 30-40 percent of our membership at competitions and speaker sessions. What can we do to engage our members more fully?

One step being initiated by a Biehler-Kronenberg proposal is for Forum sessions called “Print Improvement Clinics” which will have 4 small clusters of members meet once each half-year in small groups distributed around corners of the Thoreau Auditorium and each led by a senior VPS photographer acting as a “Mentor”. The Mentor would comment on “What is right but could be strengthened in images” rather than “What are the weaknesses that need fixing.” Each cluster would have about 4-5 members (each bringing 3 images) at the most and would interact intensively with each other and the Mentor as a private, intimate discussion about each image. The emphasis would be on development, growth and improvement. The clusters of member would not interact with each other but only with their own small group.

11. SHOULD FOCAL POINTS INCLUDE **CLASSIFIED ADS** FROM MEMBERS AS A REGULAR COLUMN?

There was no objection to this, either for Focal Points or for forwarded bulky messages. See above under Agenda Item 9.

12. SHOULD MEMBER DATABASE USED BY Director of Membership BE REVISED?

Might the fields presently included in the record of each member be expanded beyond contact information to include such things as: Length of time in VPS? Membership in other clubs? What photo gear is owned? What software is used? etc. etc.

In principle, this is not a problem although it would make the current spreadsheet bigger. But it might also contain useful information that could guide decision-making, survey development, and other useful tasks of Board members.

13. HOW DEAL WITH MEMBERS WHO FAIL TO RENEW IN SEPT. OR OCT? Perhaps have Membership Director follow up one or two times (until early Nov.) with a brief email that encourages them to renew membership and includes a brief confidential survey using

SurveyMonkey to solicit their views on the club in order to better understand why they are not renewing and what might encourage them to renew?

Phil says: I will proceed, as I indicated, to purge member names from our club roster and our bulky mailing roster soon after the October 5 meeting. But as a measure to try to retain the lapsed member, I will—collaborating with Loma—send out an email to each “apparently” lapsed member encouraging them to renew membership and enclosing a brief survey (linked to SurveyMonkey to expedite easy handling of the survey and its analysis) to help us better understand why they did not renew. We need a better understanding of why members renew or don’t renew.

Loma says: If I remember correctly Warren deleted the members that did not renew after December. We usually have most of our regular members back by Nov-Dec as well as new member in those months. Actually we have member's join throughout the entire year, which surprised me a little when I first started with Membership.

I wouldn't ask members that haven't returned why they haven't returned, I think a much better approach would be to send an email saying "we missed you", are you returning? Let me think on it a little more.

Loma expressed the concern that we not only should continue to welcome new members with special attention messages (which she has routinely done) but also continue to make contacts with possible lapsing members to encourage them to sustain membership and to try to better understand the concerns that may have led to them to lapse (she has also routinely done this).

Phil endorsed Loma’s concerns and efforts in the past and added that perhaps limited survey probes of lapsed members might be used to (1) better understand their concerns, and (2) convey our serious interest in getting input from them to make VPS more attractive to them. Such surveys could be embedded in followup messages that go out to lapsed members from the Membership Director.

#### 14. SHOULD ALL “COM GROUP” OFFICERS ACQUIRE WEBCAMS SO WE CAN HAVE EASY ONLINE SKYPE TELECONFERENCES ONCE A MONTH?

Phil says: Skype will require one of us to subscribe to Skype Premium at \$5.00 a month, in order to have the Group Skype capability to have us all be on the same screen during a group Skype session. If that seems to be something we want to do, we can ask Sharon Connolly to put it in the VPS budget???

David says: **I'm in favor of trying the web cam communication.** I don't currently have one but all young at heart need to keep up.

Loma, Phil, David, and Ceasar either have or will purchase their own webcams and wish to participate in COM GROUP Skype conferences in order to ease the planning barriers, logistics and travel time that scheduling physical meetings entail. Mike, who does not have a webcam, is willing to participate via Skype if VPS can provide him with a webcam.

14. HOW CAN WE GET MORE AGE DIVERSITY INTO VPS—AND PERHAPS MORE MEMBERS GENERALLY?

Loma says:

A month ago, we talked about getting younger people to join the club. Guess it started with the phone call I got from a young lady wanting to join a camera club with members closer to her age. She had a valid point. During my phone conversation with you Phil, I suggested we might have a contest for say 18 to 30 year old amateur photographers to generate an interest in our club. While membership chair, I've noted there have been very few student members, one joined and never came to the meetings, another joined so she could get a copy of our By-Laws to start her own club at the local high school. She never attended a meeting or even answered my emails. I think if we initiated a contest at the local community college or universities around here er might draw the attention of students interested in photography. The contest could be judged by a selected group of our Board Members (perhaps at a forum or on a separate occasion) and ribbons could be presented to the winners and perhaps published in the local papers.

I'll reflect on this idea some more and discuss it at the 3 Sep meeting.

Cesar says:

Introduction to Photography Series for VPS - Cesar

Suggestion: Provide a sequence of lectures and critiques for a duration of 4 meetings to members of the Thoreau Middle School community as an outreach and method to solicit new members.

Audience: Parents and faculty of Thoreau Middle School (Bridge Cameras or DSLR). Bridge and DSLR are the entry level for the class because they offer more control by the photographer who is more apt to then learn the basic skills and may even join VPS-VA

Objective: Provide an introduction to Digital Photography to address the basis such as: Composition, Creativity, & Craftsmanship (divided into two lessons)

1. Lighting: The balance between ISO, Shutter and Aperture . Lesson will address the relationship and give examples. Individuals will be given an assignment were they will experiment. Students will submit their assignments for critique.
2. Creativity: Lesson will address the overall subject of creativity and cover topics such as rule of thirds and leading lines. Students will be given an assignment to practice composition techniques where the rule of thirds, and leading lines are used. Students will submit their assignments for critique.
3. Craftsmanship: Students over two lessons will learn common approaches for :

- a. Sports and portrait photography – Students will submit their assignments for critique
- b. Nature and landscape photography – Students will submit their assignments for critique

This course and other initiatives mentioned above were discussed and it was agreed that, with the leadership of the Publicity Director—who would be supported by other officers—such possible recruitment efforts would be tried.

Cesar also proposed that we should develop more specific Forums and other program initiatives to make clear to new members and younger members that VPS wants to make available more specific programs to appeal to their interests. Once again our reaction was to support this idea.