

Website Buzz (July 16 & August 01 2012)

## **Expanding The Collective Mind and Educating All by Encouraging Entries by "The Unfinished"**

*(Part One)*

### **Expanding The Collective Mind**

One continuing aim of every Contest/Event Director is (or better be, otherwise his/her customer base is failing at their employment tasking) is to Build Desired Traffic. In other words, Get People In To See The Show !

Why is patently obvious, isn't it? More who show up, larger potential for return next time event is held. A greater chance for "decent buzz" from those which creates more excitement, curiosity, etc in yet more folks. Thus causing yet new seekers to show up, experience, enjoy and that builds on itself.

Clearly, some standard offered wisdom ways to do this are "have a lot of good vendors"; "stage a big raffle with great prizes"; "provide desirable categories for competition"; "put on unique day of show events (i.e. "Speed Builds", "Guest Speakers", "Tours"). Not so clear, just HOW you do all of this, and where some of it ties into "critical feedback loops".

Cracking that knowledge nut is never as easy as "the opinion shaping share" class would have many casual observers believe. One means, "provide DESIRABLE...Competition", is just one end of a key feedback loop. One that is always in creative ferment, yet if you do it effectively, you'll get two other ends of that loop back in depth. For when folks see chances ahead of time to be competing directly (as entrants) or witnessing potential great competition, they tend to show up in reliable (and increasing) numbers. Which is seen by "good vendors", often large factors into their decision to show or not show up at your event. All which feeds any eventual day of show community's impression of "things to do, people to see". If you've more than a mere critical mass of folks showing up, or expect to, you tend to take some or more risks. As in express more unique aspects with better than even chance you'll get a return on the investment. In offer of more reasons for folks to enjoy, have good buzz on your show, want to come back again. Which feeds back to our start of course. Because more traffic results from those risk takings means others will want to be there, to have a shot at their wallets and their heads... simple marketing "tricks" maybe, but for a good reason to all involved.

One underappreciated and sometimes underutilized method of building this traffic is that of Offering "slightly off" Competitive Categories, ones that can build into real solid features. Why this is so? In part because it's just plain hard to accomplish for some (creativity challenged), it's a clear "money loser" risk to some (no imagination, unwilling to take "new" as anything positive, the "safe and sane types") Plus, to really work, it requires being a bit more than lazy or clever to sustain even if it works the first time (one hit novelists or rock bands come to mind) In model show terms, one of my favorite examples that's now a staple of Region Nine at the bigger "local" shows yet once was considered "very risky" for that level event, is "Collections". Nowadays in R-9, this category is usually treated as a basic component variation of the multiple USA Nationals Collections class, which is tucked inside the larger Miscellaneous Competitions. Basic component offering meaning, as in "Collections, All Types & Scales, 5 or more subjects with a common theme".

The original efforts in Region Nine were not always well conceived or conveyed by the hosting groups plus, for awhile, not always consistently offered (a problem of conception, in some ways relating to the end point of this Current Buzz)

Remember? Hard on creativity, risky in offer (since it basically requires someone or two or ideally, three, to finish a minimum of 15 subjects total, and be related somehow, to make 1/2/3 true competition for those awards). Plus you have to realize that offering it a minimum of two years running is likeliest true test of all that it's being well taken up.

Yet for those who kept at it, whom consistently offer this idea in practice, with extra kudos to those bold enough to tweak the formulas, the eventual rewards have become known and sought out. Several R-9 clubs (Santa Rosa/Mt Diablo, Silver Wings, Fresno Scale Modelers, Dragon Lady, SVSM, and of course Fremont Hornets, to name some) have had shows with fairly regular offerings of "Collections" as a competitive category now for several years.

One club, the Kings County Scale Modelers of Lemoore, even boldly reworked the formula. Increased fun plus less work to be doing the entry, without making it too easy. Their wise (in my estimate for one) tweak was to rule a Collection "three or more", not the five or more traditionally set amount. Which from a local level show standpoint makes several good points, yet still offers a unique competitive shot and keeping bonus "good potential traffic builder potential" aspect.

Most clubs that offer this category at all, learn to or just default to, have a more relaxed standard for the "related theme" concept. Looser than that imposed by USA Nats criteria, as a start to making this effort viable for local level events. KCSM's rule sought to overcome the other obstacle to seeing more than a handful in this area by making the key starting seed number THREE. There's more than a few avid builders of more than one but less than five of many subjects in their modelling. But with a focus on competition, far less likely the requisite five number will be reached often by many in any given single year in Region Nine, or any other for that matter. Three is a perfectly valid competitive "Collection" if you can at all concoct a common or seems so at the time, theme. Kings County Scale Modelers offered a nice chance to try this out twice that I know of, due my chance to compete in both times. I won a second or third, can't recall, in one for my then only three done "War Weary Two Seater P-51 Mustangs Collection" in 1/48. Long since, I've found two more "spicy" choices to add to this group. However to truly even compete for last place, two of my three originals would need to be repeat built. Helping to illustrate more of the several good reasons this category is hardly in danger of being "overplayed" by any.

Still many do not realize even today in my estimate, the true and awesome potential genius of even offering this category or its derivatives. Much less understand how just this one alone builds traffic plus fun. (I know, having had to defend, delineate or listen to others do the same, on this point). Nowadays, Collections is still offered at Hobby Expo (SR/Mt Diablo), Kickoff Classic (SVSM) and TriCity (FreHornets) with no frills, yet with pretty liberal criteria on theme threading as long as there's FIVE MINIMUM subjects. As well, all three shows have awarded (thusly allowed entry initially) to not just the specific modeler but to "Club X" within this category. Meaning that no "specific" split off "Group Entry" is offered but there's no bar to such entry in the Collections competition. So our own "Fremont Hornets Group Build X" wins Second place award in a field of 4 or 6. In said case displacing a single entrant's model collection in that local competition area, for real example. At USA Nats, Collections entries are split at that point first thing, with that level you have luxury of setting bar (Group vs Single Modeler as entrant). As discussed, for local level, it's enough work to try and get 3 or more model entrants (as singles or as groups) with 5 or more items into competition here. Why discourage them or make it too easy for first place by defaults with one or other by "split"? Instead we're seeing a grass roots rebellion. One to fire up some friendly rivalries with clubs or groups to getting moved to build 5 or more and entering here, which is not bad so far. No matter how it happens, we're now seeing more commonly, 3 plus entry in Collections of either all single modelers or a mix single/group in Region 9.

Result? Viewing audience (modelers and non mods alike) are treated to a larger group of good modeling items. The entrants can put together oft times sets that for several reasons (prior winners singly, not done all at same time, a group "unlike" for entry in a single category otherwise...) wouldn't be "all present & accounted for". Many who do this entry regularly enough have some off the path themes. Or very popular ones that aren't as aforesaid, a group that lends itself to being in one place competitively at local level otherwise. Like as a Collection Entry Example; theme of "Grumman Iron Works" (FF-1 to F8F). It would mix Biplanes (FF-1, F2F, F3F) with Single Eng Prop (F4F, F6F, F8F) plus Multi Eng Prop (F5F, F7F) regardless of what scale chosen. Thus in competition terms, this would never be "seen" as a group.

But this "Collection" would be VERY eye catching and educational, as well as compete very fiercely, wouldn't you agree? Revise theme to "Grumman Cats" and you stretch beyond that. Now Single Engine and MultiEngine Jets to complicate it, while removing those Biplanes. Unless you just go for the whole match. "Grumman Naval Fighter Collection" and you include them all. That is just ONE example set that I have seen done (although yes at a Nats Level, never quite that particular ambitious set at a local) Reaction of those who get to share in this, in the range from audience to entrant standpoint, says this effort is very worthwhile. Making choice of "taking risk of spending time and money" to offer simply "Collections" (3 or 4 or 5 plus) alone, as a simple category.

Who knows, mayhaps one of these days we'll see chance to spoil everyone further. Spurring on enough entries to "split" into say, "Large" and "Smaller" Collections, based on one of several easy criteria. "Large" could be multiples beyond 3/4/5 minimum, with "Smaller" being of course the bare or nearly bare minimum bar. Or, "Large" as in few subjects but of such mass (1/16 Dodge Chargers) that counterpart would be "Smaller" with 15 items, but effectively of little mass (1/35 figure sets). Conceive participation reliably generated enough for a Contest Director to just offer "Group (Club or otherwise two/more )" AND "Single" Collection category at local or Regional competitions. Chances are very good that everyone involved from new walkins to long time vendors would benefit positively in increased traffic and FUN! Granted, I am selfish and biased in this manner, having promoted this concept for many years now within our community. Still, am seeing the fruits of this labour on the average as growth industry now.

This concludes the first half of "Buzz" on this exploration into Traffic. Next we'll take up "Unfinished" business.

*(Second and Final Portion)*

#### **ENCOURAGING " UNFINISHED " BUSINESS**

Offering "Collections" as a Traffic and Fun Generator for the Local Contest, was the first half of this essay topic, discussed last time.

Unfinished is another whole kettle of fish from the same sea... A category/concept gem that's too easily dismissed.

My first major experience with "Unfinished" was many now years ago, as Head Judge of this category at the Vallejo Maritime Museum, site of a local contest. For the record, I found out (much) later the entire genesis of the category even being offered was somewhat not meant to be taken too seriously. I did, for one and am still very glad of it. Before serious Judging work began, I had a team of folks to work. Whom I told my plans to preemptively strike for us all, ask the Event Head Judge to allow us a "split".

With team at least on board, to the Officer of the Day I went. (yes, most thought I was nuts for doing it or expecting any yes result. Even after hearing my case, frame of reference for doing it, majority assented it was valid but had no faith still...) He was shocked but did hear me out and only asked that I not take too long with this. With a "split" into 10 each from original 20 entries for "Unfinished" category, we awarded first/second/third twice. One set each in "Less Unfinished" and "More Unfinished" categories. Done with complete integrity and knowledge built, trails blazed, respect snatched from the jaws of "knowing talking heads"

Marvelous experience plus as you see, a searing one. It was not repeated as an offering, however, for a good long while, as I said, wasn't done serious.

Now, entry offered in the "Unfinished" category by the Hobby Expo host clubs for several years. Recently we have offered it with Tri City 7, Kickoff Classic 2012, with good turnouts. Thus now REPEATING this category for both, along with of course Hobby Expo carrying it on "business as usual". Sadly, no one has yet managed doing any such splits as I had again. I can assure you though, at Hobby Expo 2012 with entrant numbers in this plus quality of work offered in it, that split would have occurred to me to ask for. Too soon I digress. Main point here : an "Unfinished" category is misunderstood but real way to build traffic.

Plus chance for you to generate excitement, shed light/educate/demo "great modeling skills" and teach your Judges some useful skill sets, "old masters" or "newbies" alike.

It's also ONE CATEGORY that GUARANTEES EVERYONE can ENTER AND COMPETE FAIRLY with NO EXCUSES NOT TO, other than "I don't want to". Unlike "Out of the Box" which has become so "gamed" it makes me laugh, "Unfinished" provokes wildly passionate disrespect or awe in many. More importantly, "UF" draws ever so slowly a larger group of entrants anyways, which is what it should do. While I saw for this year an example of someone "gaming" even the Unfinished category, this instance was fairly unique. Proper experienced Judges would have seen it and made sure would have been dealt with squarely. In the end, the basics of category integrity remained intact.

Now, why is "Unfinished" in my estimate a "traffic builder" or "way to excite or educate or both", so worth getting into YOUR contest retinue ? As either Contest Director to offer it or ask for as Contestant (no such thing as Potential Contestant here, if you get more than a few parts attached, you're an entrant of some measure...if you want to be)?

BECAUSE here's the one place that's most similar to one big fun aspect of "social modeling and meetings of same" Think of "Unfinished" as a mix of your entire Region's "club meeting table of WIP" (Works In Progress) basically ... You know how much fun, interesting material that folks bring "while in the middle of it". How you can see and get things that, otherwise later on, are simply disappearing under the finish coats, or accoutrement piled on, all that. In "UF category", you can and should with proper slice of percentages, have a grand range of Works In Progress. That alone will have the experienced along with the newly minted or just curious, entirely engaged looking it all over. Plus asking for info, scoping out for themselves or with "knowledgeable friends" what is going on with the items in play.

One underutilized aspect in example: table mix of bare bones basic assemblies of armored fighting vehicles, single engine and multi engine aircraft, automobiles with say just two or three brave souls having a ship or figure underway in there. CONSIDER NOW, all that is the "common" of our chosen hobby actually is easier to see. "BASICS" are there to see, plain as day. All those items "in the raw, underway" begin to have a look and feel of "what's right, what's not". Show problems in progress. Sharing look at how things get solved. Now "aftermarket", "scratchbuilt", resin, mixed media, etc, all the terms and blathering have different dimension. All that sort of "master modeler" talk with which we may entirely mystify or drive off pretty good potential modeler mates with, Here, in "UF" all take on new meanings with a look here along with chance to truly drive home when someone's really "mastering" their art, craft. Honestly, once you have judged several works in various stages of "in progress", you get "it" so much more clearly. Where modelers who win consistently are obviously "on it" from the start of their work.

Yes, it stands out THAT clearly. Also, how much we as major league modelers sometimes miss out how best to demonstrate why we do, what we do, and how we do. (meant as we build and buy and blather a lot more than the majority who do this all very much more casually and find FineScale Modeler to be heavy reading...) As well lose touch somehow at times how fun it is, being simply "in process", sometimes that's all there even needs to be.

By offering "Unfinished" as a basic category, and working to learn how to set up some very simple 'derivative' guidelines to split out. Like as "Less" "More" "Barely Started" "Damned Near Done" as possible sets of this competitive, potential useful tool for traffic building and fun injection. All which would be useful to us now, hey? Like I said, where else can you come up with such an easy means to boost the number of models on competition table with almost zero excuses other than unwilling (for what ever reason, all valid even "I don't want at all to encourage this silly business continuing") or (gasp) having to finally admit you just BUY them you really don't BUILD them, ever. That's also okay, only a topic for another Buzz entirely.

SO I hope I have provoked some responses even positive ones in the mix too. Mind you, I've "lectured" on this and the "Collections" topic to more than a few crowds over the years, and hope to again before I get carried out of here.

Until next time...Have Fun, or you're not doing it right (my estimate of only rule in modelling... if any) mickb smilodon49