

Growing chess clubs

By Christopher Skulte (ECF Bronze Member Rep, Hammersmith Chess Club Committee (>100 members), and part-owner of the London MindSports Centre. – September 2021

About

There are many different ways you can grow your chess club, I come from a club that was struggling with about 20 members a number of years ago, and slowly fading, now we have over 100 members. I also notice recently that ECF club of the year has taken a similar approach, therefore I encourage you to read about both club's stories, to get some greater insight into the journey that is possible.

The Goal

Ultimately, it's about obtaining a digital presence, so when people search for chess in your area, you want them to easily find your club.

Many people have only played online, and giving them a taster for the types of activities you run reduces the barrier to entry for them turning up that first time.

How?

We outline below a dual approach using

- a) Twitter
- b) A website that is based on a blog/newsletter

This dual approach is suggested as:

- a) It's fairly easy to setup and maintain.
- b) A lot of the chess community are on twitter and you will get a lot of engagement, as well as seeing what clubs are up to near and far.
- c) A newsletter/blog based website ensures it is always current news, and provides a distribution list that will receive your club updates.

Twitter

Twitter is a social media platform where you can post messages publicly that anyone can find, and also interact with others on the platform. This is important as it's a very public way to engage with people you may not know, and people you don't know to find you.

More on Twitter here: <https://www.lifewire.com/what-exactly-is-twitter-2483331>

Here are two examples of larger clubs in London which use Twitter, you can click the links to see the types of posts they write about.

- Battersea twitter: <https://twitter.com/batterseachess>
- Hammersmith twitter: https://twitter.com/hammer_chess

How do I setup a Twitter account?

We have found this good article summarising the process to setup a Twitter Account.

<https://www.lifewire.com/join-twitter-by-setting-up-account-3486230>

Website

This section gives a light overview of how to setup your own website for the club and make it relevant for chess.

This is just a suggestion, and there are many many different platforms out there that you can use.

We suggest building a website on wordpress:

<https://wordpress.com/>

Why?

- a) It has software which makes it as easy as using Microsoft Word.
- b) Gives you really nice looking templates, point & click interface, thousands of “plugins” you can download to add functionality.
- c) Your new posts will go out as a newsletter to members, with a simple link to post onto twitter.
- d) Ultimately it’s very versatile and pretty idiot proof!! Hence why we like it at Hammersmith 😊

To put chess diagrams and games into your newsletters, we have setup a lichess account for the club. Lichess also has a very simple interface. (<https://lichess.org/>)

You can upload PGNs straight to lichess, then there’s an option to “embed in your website”. It gives you a snippet of code that you copy & paste on to your webpage, and lichess does the rest.

Again, really simple and idiot proof! And the lichess interface is really intuitive

Here are two blog/newsletter based websites to get some ideas from:

Hammersmith website: <https://hammerchess.co.uk/>

Battersea website: <https://www.batterseachessclub.org.uk/>

Closing

The more your club engages with the community around you, the more and more people will hear about you. Many clubs put in so much effort and do great things which no one hears about. Spread the message, not just for yourself, but it also gives other clubs ideas of things they can run too.

The final suggestion is to engage in the community, partner up with a local charity and help them raise money while playing chess with the community, interact with businesses and clubs in the local area, show the social side of your club too (not just the chess).

I hope the above helps your club on it’s journey, and if you’re struggling with any of the above, do a twitter post asking for help, we are a community for a reason – the response may surprise you.