

If you've been reading this series of articles over the last few issues, you have probably gathered by now that I'm a big advocate of improving the general standards of our shooting facilities in an attempt to attract more people into the sport and to improve its image in the public's eye. But, I also believe that this is only part of the solution to a fairly complex problem.

The area where I feel shooting sports has really missed the mark, and we could improve upon, is in public relations and marketing – an area where we really don't excel. That may be because we're too busy enjoying our sport and have unconsciously decided to leave that awkward subject to the talents of the few organisations who have motivated themselves in that direction.

From experience, we all know there's a considerable amount of

organised misinformation being 'fired around' concerning shooting and guns, with the manipulation of public opinion and perception as the aim. I don't think it's a situation where there's a definitive bunch of 'bad-guys' or someone that we can point fingers at – we've all just let it evolve around us. But since much of this is largely driven by negative television programming and the various news media, what can we now do to debunk this malicious nonsense and gain the trust of non-shooting parents (particularly mothers) whose opinions are influenced by their strong desire to live in a safe environment?

### BE PRO-ACTIVE

To begin with, let's not blame the media and the non-shooting public entirely for their general ignorance of shooting. They are clearly not

motivated to find out about our sport – and why should they be?

But what have we done, individually or collectively, to improve our image, market our sport and change the public's perception of shooting?

Have we sent a rebuttal to any of the news media when we see, hear or read negative stories about our sport?

Have we contacted the media with press releases containing positive news about events we host?

Have we ever invited the local or national non-shooting press to a special event or fundraiser for a popular local charity so they can see what we do?

In most cases the answer is probably 'No'. It takes too much

time, plus it really is depressing stuff! Seriously, I'm quite sure many range owners and event co-ordinators have attempted on more than one occasion to answer these questions proactively but have met with closed doors and deaf ears, and then fallen into a mood of complacency as a result. Quite frankly, I don't blame them. Repeated rejection is hard on the soul.

However, a continuous stream of positive information about local events, from many sources and showing large numbers of participants having an enjoyable and safe time, cannot go ignored forever – especially if some money generated by those events pays for much needed items in the local community. Perseverance pays off.

Could it be that it's what we look like or how we are dressed that the various types of media don't like? I must admit we haven't adopted a golf course code of dress and etiquette yet, but maybe there is room for improvement here. I'm not insinuating that we all hurry out and purchase the latest Gucci range-loafers or Armani shooting

# MARKETING...

**RAY FORMAN OF CLAY-SPORT INTERNATIONAL DEBATES  
THE NEED FOR MORE MARKETING AND BETTER MEDIA CONTACT FOR  
THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SPORT.**

# ...AND MORE MARKETING



NO SHIRT, NO SHOES – NO TARGETS?



vests, but perhaps we should at least set a minimum standard. No shoes, no shirt, no targets?

## INFORMED SPOKESPERSON

Perhaps it's the manner in which we deliver our 'message' that causes the media's doors to be closed in our faces or their hearing to be tuned-out. Do we have a credible spokesperson in our midst who can effectively or convincingly deliver our message locally and nationally to the non-shooting public? Preferably one using a non-antagonistic and entertaining delivery; particularly important when anti-gun rhetoric heats up. Unfortunately, in many cases the average shooter is just not up to the task. It could, therefore, be worthwhile considering the 'official' appointment of a 'Media-contact' in each State or Zone that has all the facts and figures at his command to handle media contact at all levels – a recognised contact point for journalists to turn to for accurate information, opinion and comment.

Whilst on the subject of media, we are all aware that newspapers and TV are always interested in 'celebrity stories'. Can you imagine the impact on the public if Arnold Schwarzenegger, and others like him, shot clay targets (with the

appropriate firepower of course...) at a televised event? Think about the tremendous positive effect it could have on the audience and for the sport if he enjoyed himself then repeated his almost legendary 'Terminator' line, "I'll be back..."

Is this feasible or just fantasy? I really can't tell. I personally don't know Mr. Schwarzenegger or anyone else with his level of stardom, but maybe someone out there does, and could perhaps convince him or some other 'hero' celebrities to support our sport. There are a number of celebrity events currently held each year throughout the country, but for some reason they never seem to quite make the national headlines or have the huge impact on the public we're looking for. I'm quite sure they would have a great impact on the viewing audience, with a positive trickle down effect to shooting, if they could be given a national TV audience.

## MAKE IT EASY

Even with the best marketing tools however, there are some obstacles inherent in shooting that a beginner has to overcome; one of which is the ability to take up the sport when the urge hits them. Think about it. If you wanted to play tennis, you can buy a racquet and be playing within minutes of walking out of the store. With shooting it's not so easy. The beginner still has a trip to the store, but that's where the similarity ends. Choosing the right beginner's tennis racquet is not quite like choosing the right beginner's gun, even with help from the sales staff. Added to this, there is the licensing process and waiting period to comply with. Such delay can erode the urge to try the game! Then there's the hurdle of finding a suitable range

in a handy location that offers some reasonable coaching to overcome the 'intimidation' factor. Unfortunately, our 'instant' lifestyle of today is working against us here, and this lengthy process is no doubt off-putting to many people.

So, can we help? I think so. Perhaps not with the current licensing process, but range owners could align themselves more with local sporting goods stores in their area, and offer special introductory rates for beginners. Discounts on the store's merchandise could be agreed to for first time buyers, while shooting lessons and a place for them to try the guns and equipment could be arranged with similar discounts at the shooting range. A program like this would help to eliminate much of the guess work and let the beginner shoot sooner. There's an added bonus too. These stores usually cater to a variety of sports, and with some eye catching in-store advertising it could also attract someone who's just dropped in to buy a canoe paddle...

## THE DARK SIDE

Following on from my comments in previous issues, where I talked about improving (in part) the non-shooting public's perception by upgrading shooting range standards, there is a downside to the argument – because too much improvement too quickly could result in a disregard for the realities of sustainable growth and economic viability. Basically, it is not enough to just build good facilities; they have to succeed. If not, they're about as useless as a rubber crutch to both the owner and the sport...

In today's gun-sensitive climate, the "...build it and they will

come" principle is best left to the celluloid alchemists in the movie studios. What if 'they don't come'? Well, the loss of financial investment is certainly painful for the owner, but there's a danger to the whole sport of shooting as well, in that such failures provide yet more negative statistics which can be used to undermine our credibility by those opposed to shooting. Although I think shooting facilities should be of a higher standard to match other sports, they do us absolutely no good if they turn out to be empty, quiet, mothballed 'monuments' – doing your homework and investing in marketing and publicity becomes ever more important.

## BEST FOOT FORWARD

After a little over three decades in the sport now, I'm trying to keep my comments and ideas in this column constructive; especially when I discuss areas of shooting that I think need improvement. We all know it's easy to criticise, but only constructive criticism which results in mediative action will make the sport prosperous and more acceptable to the public – which reminds me of a story! When he was a young man and before he became the great orator and statesman, Sir Winston Churchill was attempting to build a small brick wall at the front of his house. A master bricklayer happened to be passing one day and looked at the wall and then began to laugh. He made no bones about listing the deficiencies in the great man's attempt at brickwork. Sir Winston allowed the man to finish, then quipped, "Any idiot can see what's wrong with it – but can you tell me what's right with it?" We too, need to make more effort promoting 'what's right' about clay target shooting.