



# TOP 10 WAYS TO INCREASE PARTICIPATION

By John Ainsworth

[www.makesportfun.com](http://www.makesportfun.com)



## Thank you

Thanks for signing up for my free guide to how to increase participation. I think the work you do getting people active is fantastic. That's why I work to help you reach more people and increase participation.

It always amazed me how hard it was to find a summary of what works in increasing participation, so I read all the top reports and started using the results. Lo and behold it worked. So I wanted to share that information with everybody.

I've identified the most common recommendations from the top UK and international physical activity interventions. Details of each of the reports are at the end of this report.

This is a useful document. Please use it.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'John Ainsworth'.

John Ainsworth  
Make Sport Fun



## About us

Make Sport Fun is a friendly two-person company, supported by a team of crack-shot freelancers. We focus exclusively on marketing fitness, sport and activity in order to get more people to participate in sport and activity.

I went to a school which was obsessed with sport. However I wasn't terribly keen on the idea at the time. In fact Tim McLeish and I once spent a whole term's worth of PE lessons hiding in the music department so the teacher wouldn't know we existed.

It wasn't till I was 14 that I found out that I didn't hate sport. I just hated team sport. I'm not one of life's natural team players. However I love running, swimming, cycling, squash, martial arts and loads more individual sports. At this point I found it hard to believe that no-one had told me about how much fun sport could be. Of course they had. It's just that they weren't very good at saying it.

Over the years since I've seen many people have that "A-ha!" moment, where they realise what all these sporty people have been talking about.

It's this difference between how much fun sport can be, and how it's sold to people which drove me to get involved in sports marketing, and show people just how much fun sport can be.

After working in marketing for a couple of years I got a job with Sport England as campaigns manager. It quickly became clear to me that there are a lot of people who work in sport and have a marketing role, but didn't know how to use marketing effectively. I did my best to help everyone while working at Sport England, but I could see that there was a need for more than 1 person, so I set up Make Sport Fun.

Because we focus exclusively on fitness, sport and activity marketing we are much more experienced and successful in getting results in that area than a traditional marketing or social marketing agency. As a result we are regularly hired by the Department of Health, PCTs, local councils, Transport for London and many more organisations to boost the number of people involved in sport and activity.

At Make Sport Fun we specialise in two main areas:

1. We run marketing campaigns for you
2. We run training workshops to teach you how to run a successful marketing campaign yourself

## Campaigns

Our campaign services include:

- Campaign Management
- Direct mail
- Design and print
- Writing
- Websites
- Email marketing

We have discovered through years of research and experimentation that effective activity marketing campaigns have 4 stages - Know, Link, Try, and Repeat. It's often tempting to spend lots of time on fancy looking marketing materials – a funky website, a groovy poster campaign – without focusing on these basics. However, we have learnt that you must follow these 4 stages in an activity marketing campaign - something that we've often learnt the hard way!



## Training

We offer three training workshops that have already been delivered to clients throughout the UK and resulted in very positive feedback. These are:

- Double your marketing results through writing
- Social media marketing
- Plan and implement your marketing with [promotingactivity.com](http://promotingactivity.com)

If you would like to learn any more about these services then go to [www.makesportfun.com](http://www.makesportfun.com), email me ([john@makesportfun.com](mailto:john@makesportfun.com)) or call me on 0203 239 8824.

To find out how we can help you increase participation simply call on 020 3239 8824 or go to [www.makesportfun.com/contact-us/free-consultation](http://www.makesportfun.com/contact-us/free-consultation).



## About you

Getting people active is your job. And you're good at it. You might have studied sports development at university and then worked as a Sports Development Officer, or you might have started in a wider health role and moved over to work in sport, fitness or activity. You're good with people, you're good at organising clubs, events and activity.

But now marketing's part of your job, and that's the problem. You're not a marketing expert, and you don't want to be.

You're expected to promote the activities you put on, and you use flyers and posters to do that. But you're not sure whether that's the most effective thing to do.

You try to work with your internal communications team, but they're more focussed on other projects, and don't give you as much support as you need.



## Top 10 ways to increase participation

So, here are the 10 most important things to do to increase participation.

1. Empower local communities
2. Marketing campaigns and communication
3. Taster sessions and classes
4. Engagement with partner organisations
5. Coaches and professionals
6. Improve facilities
7. Social marketing approach
8. Strong leadership
9. Help people use their peer network
10. Workplace

These have been gathered from the top reports into how to increase participation. Reports put together by the top organisations in sport, activity and health. Sport England, Department of Health, British Heart Foundation, National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE) and many more. The ones at the top of the list were recommended by nearly every report, whereas the ones at the bottom of the list were recommended less often.

Over the following pages I will explain what each of them means in more depth, how others have used that principle to increase participation and how it can work for you. Then, later in this guide I will explain some of the systems and some of the free tools available to allow you to put this into practice yourself.

Of course, if you have any more questions, or need any help with this then please get in touch with me ([john@makesportfun.com](mailto:john@makesportfun.com) or 020 3239 8824). Or claim your free consultation by going to [www.makesportfun.com/contact-us/free-consultation](http://www.makesportfun.com/contact-us/free-consultation).



## 1. Empower local communities

The basic principle here is to empower local people through a bottom up approach. Listen to what local people want, use outreach to cascade training and help people help themselves. It's vital to create local capacity – promote and support volunteering by residents but expect turnover of volunteers and plan and manage for this.

By working with local communities you can make it last, and build a culture of sustainability and self help. This means putting community level interventions and programmes into place, investing in interventions and programmes that identify and build on strengths and weaknesses of individuals and communities and providing small grants, as part of a strategic vision, which helps build goodwill with local communities and stakeholders, and generates a climate of trust.

### **Case study – Love2 Campaign**

The Love2 Campaign is an example of how this can work. This is a campaign run by Pro-Active South London aimed at 15-19 year old girls. They provide small grants and support for local organisations to put on a series of taster sessions for 15-19 year old girls to get started in sport. The goal is that the people who take part then continue to take part in activity afterwards.

<http://www.makesportfun.com/casestudy/case-study-love2-programme/>

### **Case study - Walking for Health**

Walking for Health provide support, including training to people interested in leading walking groups. This then allows the walk for health leaders to run walking groups themselves.

<http://www.wfh.naturalengland.org.uk/>

### **Case study - Fit as a Fiddle**

This is a project run by Age UK, where they help local groups to identify what activity they would like to do, then support them in putting that activity on.

<http://www.ageuk.org.uk/health-wellbeing/fit-as-a-fiddle/>



## 2. Marketing campaigns

In the past many sports, fitness and activity marketing campaigns have been focussed on showing people the health benefits of getting active. However most people know that activity is good for them, and many believe that they already do enough activity. The marketing campaigns which work best are focussed on driving people to do a specific activity rather than just talking about activity generically.

Ensure marketing and communications are tailored to target groups – many will immediately switch-off with references to sport;

1. Deliver policies, interventions and programmes tailored to change specific, health-related behaviours, including marketing campaigns
2. Focus on body image and self-confidence

### **Case study – Norfolk Facebook campaign**

The team at Active Norfolk have found Facebook particularly useful in promoting the recent Village Games project, which is giving thousands of villagers in rural Norfolk new opportunities to play sport on their doorstep.

Norfolk have a particularly big rural community, so they have put on the Village Games which brings sport to rural communities by pitting village against village in a mixture of activities including 5 a-side football, golf, tug of war, bowls, badminton, archery and table tennis.

Facebook has been a big part of the marketing drive, with the Active Norfolk team investing in a Facebook advertising campaign to drive interested parties to the Village Games section of their website. Active Norfolk were charged each time someone clicked on the Village Games page from the advert. Facebook advertising allows you to set certain parameters, such as location, so that the adverts only appeared to people who live in Norfolk. In total, the Village Games campaign saw the advert appear 4 million times, which led to 945 clicks at a total cost of £620.00.

This worked so well that they're now using Facebook to market the Corporate Games, a business version of the Village Games project.

<http://www.makesportfun.com/casestudy/facebook-spreads-the-word-in-rural-norfolk/>





### 3. Taster sessions and classes

According to our research approximately 80% of sports development teams already run taster sessions and classes and classes, which is fantastic. One reason this works so well for increasing participation is because it makes it easier for people to get started. People feel comfortable knowing that they won't be the only beginner there.

There are 3 main things to focus on when running taster sessions and classes – making them fun, free and friendly. However, if you simply make the classes free then some people will stop coming once they have to start paying. The Get Back Into programme found out that if you instead offer people a voucher which gets them the free session then they assign value to the classes and are more likely to keep coming.

Another important factor to keep people coming back is to make sure that the taster sessions are on the same day and time and at the same place as the regular sessions. People are free on specific days at specific times and if they need to change at the end of the taster sessions then it will increase your drop out rate.

#### **Case study - Get Back Into**

Get Back Into are 6-12 week taster session courses run by County Sports Partnerships (Regional Sport England) and their Partners to bring a choice of activities. The classes are fun and friendly, with qualified coaches. People can simply search for an activity via the post code search and click on the activity for further information.

<http://www.getbackinto.co.uk/>

#### **Case study - Go Play Rugby**

Go Play Rugby was a campaign from the Rugby Football Union in 2007 while the Rugby World Cup was going on. It was aimed at 18-30 year old men who'd played rugby before. They ran mass-media advertising driving people to register their details online or by text and they then sent details of where someone could play rugby. They ran a series of taster sessions and classes at rugby clubs up and down the country and got 9,000 new people to play rugby.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EnRfiN-d7cs>

#### **Case study - Stride**

<http://www.traffordleisure.co.uk/sporttrafford/physical-activity/stride.html>

#### **Case study - Love2**

<http://www.makesportfun.com/casestudy/case-study-love2-programme/>



## 4. Engagement with partners

Sport has to work closely not only with other sport bodies (e.g. NGBs, NHS Council), but also with non-sports organisations and departments (e.g. social services, housing, GPs). The more partnerships and the more diverse the partnerships the better – have ‘a foot in both camps’ by working closely with people from a number of different organisations.

The most important factor in driving up participation in sport and active recreation is being able to consult and then connect with non-participants in the general population – the more partners you have, the more access you have to local residents, and the more opportunities there are to access sources of funding.

### Examples

- Watford police, fire and sports development all working together
- Fit as a Fiddle working with organisations who have their own networks - <http://www.ageuk.org.uk/health-wellbeing/fit-as-a-fiddle/>
- Let's Get Moving - [http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH\\_105945](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_105945)



## 5. Coaches and professionals

It's probably no surprise that coaches and professionals are on this list. What might be surprising is that they're only at number 5. I think this might be because providing high-quality coaching is something that this country is already quite good at, so there are other things which are now more important to get right.

I've identified some good examples of where coaches and professionals have been taken into a less formal environment to help get people started in sport or activity, instead of just catering to those who are already active.

### **Case study - Streetgames**

Streetgames coaches run unstructured sessions for young people. They provide enough structure that people know a session will be happening and where it will be, but then allow people to get on and play the game, instead of focussing on drills and training. This provides a positive environment for those who don't want to make the commitment to training, but do enjoy playing.

[www.streetgames.org](http://www.streetgames.org)

### **Case study - No strings Badminton**

No strings Badminton removes many of the barriers to playing badminton. You can just turn up and play, without booking a court and without finding someone to play against. The coach will simply match you up with someone of a similar level.

<http://www.nostringsbadminton.co.uk/>

### **Case study - Back to Netball**

Back to Netball is aimed at getting 18-30 year old women back into playing Netball. There are a lot of women who played netball at school, and then don't play again after that. They don't want to play in the competitive environment of a netball club, but they would like to have a game. So a professional netball coach sets up a weekly game in a community centre or other non-threatening environment, and then once the group is running they help one of the people train to become a coach herself.

<http://www.englandnetball.co.uk/Back-to-Netball/>



## **6. Facilities – including parks, open spaces, etc.**

For a long time the attitude to increasing participation in this country has been “build it and they will come”, and it hasn’t led to an increase in participation. Improving a facility clearly gives a good experience to someone doing activity, but it does less to drive new people to take part in activity. On top of that building and improving facilities is very expensive (about £7 million for a new swimming pool and £12 million for a new leisure centre I believe).

Here I’ve therefore focussed on some examples of how people have improved facilities for taking part in activity without spending a huge amount of money.

### **Case study – Swiss Cottage tai chi sessions**

Camden Sports Development team talked to their colleagues in the Swiss Cottage library and put on a Tai Chi session in the foyer of the library. It’s a great new library and has a open, airy foyer. In order to get into the library people had to go past the Tai Chi sessions, so the only marketing they had to do for these sessions was to put up a poster explaining how to join in. Quite quickly the session became full and they have now put on a second session on another day.

### **Case study – shopping centre walking group**

Walking groups in Hull would lose members every winter to the cold conditions. So someone decided to take the group to walk around the inside of the local shopping centre instead. They even got sponsored by the Costa Coffee. This meant a lot less people dropped out over the winter, and when spring came they moved back outside, with lots more members.

### **Case study - Get more people cycling**

The Get More People Cycling project challenges teams, departments and companies to compete against each other – to see who can get the most people to cycle for 10 minutes or more. The idea being that people who give cycling a go are more likely to start doing it regularly. They found that without any central funding companies started improving their facilities for cycling (adding access to showers in gyms or on site and adding cycle racks) because so many of their staff were travelling to work that way.

<http://www.makesportfun.com/casestudy/get-more-people-cycling/>



## 7. Social marketing – tailor to the groups

The lapsed participants research from Sport England found that overwhelmingly, the ultimate cues for lapsing come from big shifts in participants' lives: life-stage-driven lack of TIME and ENERGY and the sense of having different priorities. We therefore need to understand where people are, what their situation is, and work from there. Luckily we have help with this in the form of a segmentation model from Sport England and one from Department of Health. We also have further insight work which we have done. This is all available on [www.promotingactivity.com](http://www.promotingactivity.com).

### **Case study – Girls get going in Brent**

The Brent Sports Development Team has recently been able to launch four new sport programmes for young women with the help of funding from Play Sport London (funding originates from the London Development Agency). The funding process, which was managed by PRO-ACTIVE West London, has helped the team set up four activities – hip-hop skipping, aerobics, badminton, and girls' football.

The activities were decided upon after using the strategic planning tool available on [promotingactivity.com](http://www.promotingactivity.com), which helped the team identify the 'Leanne' demographic as its target market – females aged 18 to 25, often with children, who have little time to exercise.

<http://www.makesportfun.com/casestudy/girls-get-going-in-brent/>

### **Case study – Hounslow helps women back in to exercise**

With the help of funding from the London Development Agency's Play Sport London programme, a Fusion Lifestyle team working on behalf of Hounslow Borough Council has recently been able to set up a series of programmes aimed at encouraging women within the borough back into exercise. The funding process was managed by PRO-ACTIVE West London.

The team used the market segmentation toolkits on [promotingactivity.com](http://www.promotingactivity.com) to identify the two most prevalent female demographics in the borough – in this case 'Leannes' and 'Chloes', young women who may not be doing as much exercise as they could or should be.

<http://www.makesportfun.com/casestudy/hounslow-helps-women-back-into-exercise/>



## 8. Leadership

Having a full time SAZ Manager was seen as vital to the success of the SAZ initiative in Liverpool – he was the main driving force behind the SAZ. The role encompassed forging strong relationships with the community, providing a strategic overview of the SAZ initiative, engaging with other agencies working in similar fields and providing funding advice. In Liverpool, the same manager was in place since the start of the initiative and this continuity provided stability to the team and the wider community. It is definitely seen as a full time position, and the charismatic leadership Gary provided was one of the keys to the success of the SAZ initiative in Liverpool, and he is well regarded by his colleagues.

It's down to us to provide this leadership, or it's down to us to find people willing to take on these leadership roles.

### **Case study - parkrun**

parkrun organise free, weekly, 5km timed runs around the world. They are open to everyone, free, and are safe and easy to take part in. These events take place in pleasant parkland surroundings and they encourage people of every ability to take part; from those taking their first steps in running to Olympians; from juniors to those with more experience.

parkrun relies heavily on volunteers, but they don't just expect people to help out. They work hard to find the right kind of people to get involved and then provided them with the right kind of equipment and support to be able to organise the runs.

<http://parkrun.com/home.aspx>

### **Case study - Walking for Health**

Walking for Health also depends heavily on volunteers, so they provide training, support and an infrastructure so that those people can take on the leadership role locally and make the walking groups a success

<http://www.wfh.naturalengland.org.uk/>



## 9. Peer-to-peer

The idea here is that if you use regular people to help others get started in activity then it will have more of an impact than if a health professional tries to get them involved.

### **Case study - LEAP**

One of the projects that brought this idea to our attention was the LEAP project which put a peer mentor programme in place. Training included a detailed local knowledge of local community services and barriers which helped, engage and raise awareness in participants. They helped their peer mentors make links with local services to help direct participants into exit routes and they also provided links with specialists offering motivational interviewing helped to keep people in physical activity.

<http://www.library.nhs.uk/publichealth/ViewResource.aspx?resID=306573>



## 10. Workplace

If you work with businesses to support people getting active then employers can support corporate membership to gyms, provide showers in the work place and consider flexible hours. As a major employer local government will need to address this area as well.

One of the key things which works for getting workplaces active is to have workplace champions. It seems that having someone in the workplace to get their colleagues excited about an activity you're running dramatically increases the amount of people who get and stay involved.

### **Case study - Climb Mount Everest project**

Someone decided to enrol their London office employees in a fitness challenge; to collectively climb the height of Mount Everest in four weeks by climbing the stairs at work.

In order to complete the climb in four weeks (20 working days) they needed to complete a total of 388 climbs – an average of 19.4 times a day. There are around 40 people in the office on a typical day which means that each individual needs to climb the stairs every other day. By Day 2 they had already reached the height of Ben Nevis, and by day 10 they had reached top of Mount Everest in half the time.





So how do you put these ideas into action? We have developed a system which allows you to use 5 of these principles as part of a concerted campaign.

- **Empower local communities**
- **Marketing campaigns and communication**
- **Taster sessions and classes**
- **Engagement with partner organisations**
- **Social marketing approach**

This system is the 4 stages of an effective activity marketing campaign

1. Know
2. Link
3. Try
4. Repeat

### **Know**

The Know stage is about catching someone's attention. You can't communicate with someone if they don't know you exist. We use this attention to capture their contact details (e.g. email address, phone number, address or getting them to follow us on Facebook)

### **Link**

Now that we have collected people's contact details we are able to stay in touch with people and link them with where to do the sport or activity of their choice. This list of people who are signed up to receive communication from you is known as your marketing list. And building a marketing list is one of the simplest and most effective things that you can do in your marketing.

### **Try**

The try stage is based around a low barrier to entry opportunity for someone to try the activity in a taster session.

### **Repeat**

The repeat stage is your regular activity. Most people reading this are much more accomplished at putting on regular, high-quality activities that people will enjoy than I will ever be, so I won't say much about this. The main thing to focus on from a campaign perspective here is that people will drop out, and they're your best market for getting back into activity.

Sometimes people drop out and won't come back, but most people who drop out from an activity can be coaxed back in if you continue to send them updates



## Social marketing benchmark criteria

The [National Social Marketing Centre](#) have identified 8 criteria that you must meet for your work to be classified as social marketing. Here I will show you how using the 4 stage process, and the free tools on [www.promotingactivity.com](http://www.promotingactivity.com) will allow you to meet all 8 criteria.

1. Customer orientation
2. Behaviour and behavioural goals
3. Theory-based and informed
4. Insight driven
5. Exchange analysis
6. Competition analysis
7. Segmentation and targeting
8. Intervention and marketing mix

## Segmentation data

Segmentation data is based on work done by

- Sport England
- DCMS
- Experian
- DH

It is available from [www.promotingactivity.com](http://www.promotingactivity.com)

You can find out more about your own area at [www.upmystreet.com](http://www.upmystreet.com)



## Research reports

Data for this presentation was pulled from:

- National Social Marketing Centre's social marketing benchmark criteria
- Active Celebration (Department of Health)
- Foresight report (Sheffield Hallam University)
- Active People survey (Sport England)
- Be Active, Be Healthy (Department of Health)
- Health Survey for England 2008 Key findings (NHS Information Centre)
- It's Time (Women's Sports and Fitness Foundation)
- Project 'Experience of Sport' Understanding the Lapsed target (Sport England)
- LEAP report (Department of Health, Countryside Agency & Sport England)
- Behaviour Change at population, community and individual levels (National Institute of Clinical Excellence)
- Understanding the success factors in Sport Action Zones (Sport England)
- Monitoring Report (Travel Actively)

## Example campaign for the over 50s

