PUBLICIZING YOUR ROAD RALLY – A PRIMER
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Whether you've decided to start a road rally program in your SCCA region from scratch, or whether you'd like to boost attendance in your already-existing program, publicity is critical to delivering entrants to your events. Gone are the days when you could simply print up a flyer for your rally and expect every car enthusiast in a 50-mile radius to show up; in our modern world, you must now compete with countless entertainment options for the attention of would-be rallyists.

Thankfully, there are more ways than ever to get the word out about your rallies. If you have an active road rally program, you may already employ one or more of the methods below to publicize your events. However, I'm hopeful that I can suggest something that you haven't yet considered to give your program a boost in participation. (I do not warrant that this list is comprehensive…be innovative!)

- E-mail list. This may be the most effective way to keep potential rallyists informed about upcoming events. During the registration process, ask entrants to provide you with an e-mail address so that you might alert them to future events. (My local club does this on the entry form itself, but a separate notebook will work too.) It would be advisable to designate one person within your program to be the "keeper of the list" and to do the e-mail blast ahead of each event (the series chair, publicity chair, etc.)

- Webforums. Perhaps the best way to reach a wide swath of people whose particular interest might be a good fit with road rally (car enthusiasts, geocachers, orienteers, etc.) Most automotive forums have sections for events and/or regional forums; either of these is probably where you'll want to post. I recommend having a standard template that you can paste into the forum with whatever event-specific modifications are necessary, as this will save you HUGE amounts of time over creating a new post for each forum you utilize. (Please see the attached appendices for general guidelines on how to start using webforums, a sample forum posting template, as well as a list of a few automotive forums to get you pointed in the right direction.)

- Facebook. Establish a Facebook page specifically for your Region's rally program. You can do all sorts of business here: post event notices, thank competitors/workers, link interesting videos and articles, etc. Facebook is also useful in creating a sense of community among your rallyists, as they can interact there between events – it may even be serve as a "matchmaking" service between drivers and navigators! One tip: take photos at your events and tag the people in them. This will draw their friends' attention to your rally page, potentially attracting new participants.

- Car clubs and meet-ups. Most enthusiast-oriented car marques have some sort of local club, whether it's a formally organized group with officers and a charter, or whether it's just a bunch of guys who hang out in a parking lot once a month. Either way, reach out to these groups. Send personal invitations to club officers, event coordinators, etc. Go to meet-ups. The road rally community can offer these clubs a ready-made competitive event that their members can enjoy, without having to shoulder the workload of organizing, writing, and sanctioning a rally themselves.

- Flyers. The oldest of the old-school approaches. Create something clean and simple…there's no excuse for having an ugly, cluttered flyer. Distribute liberally. Send or e-mail copies to all of the local car clubs in your area. Take a stack of flyers to car shows and meet-ups, automotive-related businesses, coffee shops, and any other place that will give you bulletin board space.

- Calling cards. Popular with single-marque car clubs. Get some business cards made up (Vistaprint is a good source for free ones) and carry them around in your car. If you spot a vehicle that gives off the right "ready-to-rally" vibe, leave 'em a card.

- Local news outlets. Write a press release – an extended version of your event flyer might suffice – and send it to the local media. If you live in a major market, you might want to skip the big, citywide daily paper and instead focus on all the smaller community papers, radio stations, etc.

- Local events calendars. Many communities have some sort of online events calendar that can be edited by (or accept submissions from) the public. Your webforum template might work for these.

- Automotive events calendars. A more focused version of the above. I use where2race.com to post monthly event notices. Hemmings Motor News also offers an online calendar, as does myautoevents.com.

When using any of these methods to promote your events, please try to temper your expectations for immediate success. Building a strong, successful road rally program takes time and effort, and it's likely that your advances toward potential new entrants are going to be rebuffed frequently. DON'T GET DISCOURAGED! Be consistent with your publicity push, and be patient! Eventually you WILL get new teams to join you.

APPENDIX A

How to use webforums for road rally promotion

1. Find a particular webforum and sign up for an account. Usually, you'll need only provide an e-mail address and some basic information, and then come up with a user name and password. If you're planning on posting to more than one webforum, it might be wise to use a common user name and password for all of them to avoid confusion.

2. Determine the forum's "first post" procedure. Many forums require new users to post a message in a specially designated newcomers' forum, primarily to sort out spammers from actual humans who want to use the forum for its intended purpose. If the forum you've chosen has this requirement, it's advisable to post a short message there saying complimentary things about the particular car marque or special interest to which the forum is dedicated, and then to declare your intention to use the forum to publicize your rally events.

3. Next, find the appropriate sub-forum to post your event notices. If you're on a national automotive forum, for example, most of them will have some sort of regional area that will cover your part of the world. They may also have a sub-forum specifically for events. EITHER OF THESE SUBFORUMS WOULD BE APPROPRIATE FOR YOUR EVENT NOTICES. In fact, you may want to cross-post into both!

4. At least a week before your event, post a notice into the appropriate sub-forum.

5. Check back with the forum every few days to see if anyone has responded to your post with any questions. Attentiveness to such inquiries can go a long way toward building enthusiasm for your events!

APPENDIX B
Sample template for webforum event notices

Below is a sample template for posting event notices into automotive webforums, which can be modified to suit the particulars of your region, the audience of the webforum itself, etc. Please feel free to copy and paste this template as needed!

WHO: Santa Monica Sports Car Club/SCCA.

WHAT: Monthly First Friday Niter Road Rally, a time-speed-distance navigational rally.

WHEN: Friday, February 1st. Registration opens at 7 p.m., beginners' meeting at 7:40, first car off at 8:01.

WHERE: Registration and rally start at the Bank of America rear parking lot, 15300 Devonshire (corner of Devonshire and Sepulveda) in Mission Hills.

WHY: You love driving and the challenge of friendly competition. You want to take the first step in learning how to work with a navigator for performance rallying or "Targa"-type events. You want to experience some of the most exciting "driver's" roads in Southern California.

THIS MONTH: We're heading to the Agua Dulce area. The route is built around canyon roads like Soledad, Agua Dulce, and Escondido, so expect a fun driving challenge. This rally should be good for beginners and veterans alike. Finish will be at Round Table Pizza in Canyon Country.

HOW: Bring your street-legal car, a navigator, a pen, a flashlight, a watch that can be synchronized with official rally time, and $20 for entry fees ($10 for SCCA members.) We'll give you a set of route instructions. The object of the rally is to follow the instructions at assigned average speeds in order to arrive at checkpoints exactly on time (to the hundredth of a minute.) And by the way: you won't know the location of the checkpoints until you get there. And it's dark.

WHAT ELSE YOU NEED TO KNOW: It's not a race. We're sanctioned by the SCCA and run on public paved roads, so assigned speeds are within posted speed limits. BUT, the roads are usually challenging and fun to drive, and the pressure of staying on time leads to a very exciting experience. We award trophies in four classes of competition, based on equipment and experience. If you're a novice, you'll run in your own special class so you don't have to go up against the experts.

FOR MORE INFO: Visit ffn.smscc.org. More questions? Post 'em here or PM me. Hope to see you on the 1st!

APPENDIX C
A starter list of automotive webforums

BMW: www.bimmerforums.com
Alfa Romeo: www.alfabb.com
Corvette: www.corvetteforum.org
Miata: www.miata.net
Fiat 500: www.fiat500owners.com
Mercedes: www.benzworld.org
BMW M3: www.m3forum.net
Audi: www.audiforums.com
Subaru: www.nasioc.com
Honda S2000: www.s2ki.com

Additionally, your region may have localized forums (such as Mazda Owners Club of California, etc.)