

RESEARCH REPORT

Ski and Snowboard School Director Perceptions of PSIA and AASI

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This summary focuses on key implications and recommendations with references to specific pages within the report. Not all implications and recommendations are addressed in the executive summary.

- PSIA/AASI initiated this research to address the following questions:
 - What are the directors' perceptions of PSIA/AASI's member services?
 - What benefits or resources are lacking for snowsports school directors?
 - How accessible is PSIA/AASI?
 - Is PSIA/AASI membership and involvement supported and/or encouraged by area management?
 - How does the PSIA/AASI certification process help or hinder the school's employee development?
 - Why is it good/not good to be associated with PSIA/AASI?
- This report discusses a qualitative investigation into perspectives held by directors of ski and snowboard schools. The result of this study is not a statistical representation of the perceptions of *all* snowsports school directors and may not be generalized to the larger population of directors. Such estimates can only be provided through a quantitative study. The respondents who participated in this study were separated into three distinct groups:
 - Directors who represent small/day resorts
 - Directors who represent large/destination resorts
 - Directors who are also members of a PSIA/AASI national team

Biggest Changes in the Industry

1. Ski and snowboard schools are big business (p. 7).

Implications: Ski/snowboard schools are expected to make a substantial financial contribution to the bottom line of a resort. If PSIA/AASI takes revenue producers (front-line instructors, clinic leaders) away from the area, then does the association compete with the goal of producing revenue? Does this provide additional incentive for areas to bring all training in-house in order to better manage labor? The potential exists for PSIA/AASI to compete with rather than complement local training.

Recommendations: Association leadership should define the extent to which PSIA/AASI products and services compete with area training and potentially increase the area's expense. In turn, PSIA/AASI should create and communicate a clear value proposition—a clear statement of the tangible results a customer receives from using a product or service—articulating how programs and services positively impact snowsports schools' performance. The message to directors should demonstrate how programs and services have a direct, positive effect on the snowsports school's bottom line (e.g., better training equals increased professionalism, resulting in higher customer satisfaction; support to offer contemporary lessons, such as park and pipe; customer service training modules that increase customer retention and repeat lessons).

2. Snowboarding has changed what resorts offer (p. 8).

Implications: Resorts are struggling to embrace the increasingly emerging ski and snowboard freeride culture. Snowsports schools are trying to develop ways to manage risk as well as lessons in terrain parks and halfpipes. Youth culture is in ascendance relative to traditional European-based alpine culture as evidenced by the X-Games and recent Olympic coverage.



Recommendations: In terms of resource allocation and attention, AASI is still perceived as a “stepchild” to PSIA—particularly at the division level¹—while snowboarding and freeriding have become mainstream. Recognizing that the old levels of (alpine) hierarchy don’t necessarily represent the same value, relevance, or needs of the new generation, new talent within the association needs to be fostered and allowed to be in charge of their own destiny. If this issue is not addressed, PSIA/AASI will be over-serving a mature market focused on an aging generation of skiers while failing to serve emerging markets.

Challenges Faced by Directors

1. Recruiting and retention of instructors is increasingly difficult (p.10).

Implications: The recruiting and retention crisis in ski/snowboard schools undoubtedly has a negative effect on PSIA/AASI’s membership growth. Respondents also emphasized that directors are focused on recruiting instructors, and that this is their problem, not PSIA/AASI’s to solve. Respondents said they believe the association places the burden for recruiting new members on the shoulders of ski/snowboard school directors. Once directors recruit new instructors, they have to educate them about PSIA/AASI because awareness among new instructors is so low. Many respondents said they feel it is unfair for PSIA/AASI to expect directors to recruit their membership for them. However, large and small areas appear to be willing to cooperate with member recruitment, provided they are given resources and materials by PSIA/AASI to do so.

Recommendations: PSIA/AASI needs to be clear about its role in recruiting members as opposed to recruiting employees. If directors feel PSIA/AASI defaults to them to recruit for the association, they don’t feel supported, and therefore may be less inclined to deliver a favorable message to their employees and management about PSIA/AASI. PSIA/AASI may need to develop a recruiting and retention campaign with messages that can be adapted locally for use by divisions and areas.

2. Maintaining a consistent level of high quality, well-trained instructors is increasingly difficult (p. 11).

Implications: Respondents appear to be unable or unwilling to articulate a value of training beyond pay increases. This is particularly difficult if PSIA/AASI is a substitute—as opposed to a supplement—for in-house training. PSIA/AASI will be challenged to overcome the real and perceived costs of training without diminishing quality, especially if area management provides meager financial reward for increased certification. Financial pressure will likely decrease the ability and incentive of directors to offer financial incentive for passing certification.

Recommendations: PSIA/AASI needs to communicate the cultural value of certification that speaks directly to snowsports school directors in a way that moves beyond pay as a sole motivator, continuing to emphasize skiing/riding skills in balance with customer service skills.

The Value of PSIA/AASI: Training and Certification (p. 13)

Implications: The common denominator for all areas is providing a consistent, nationwide standard of training and certification. However, there is some question as to whether PSIA/AASI delivers this value. If snowsports school directors (and others within the industry) believe PSIA/AASI does not have a true national standard for training and certification, then the primary value of the association does not exist. Without a clear value, the negative perception of actual and opportunity cost is magnified. While respondents still feel compelled to be part of the association, the lack of a true value proposition is making it increasingly difficult for them to convince resort management and instructor staff of the

¹ This finding doesn’t refer to quantity of materials developed by the association at the national and divisional level but to the perceived segregation between PSIA and AASI at the local level. Further, a review of division websites and the emphasis placed on traditional alpine skiing may reinforce this perception.



association's importance. Directors feel compelled to be part of PSIA/AASI, though one can argue it is because there is no viable alternative.

Recommendations: PSIA/AASI should explore ways to facilitate communication and agreement on national standards that meet the needs of areas. Divisions should come to terms with their differences and find areas of agreement. PSIA/AASI needs to ensure that it is providing appropriate levels of training for the member commensurate with what snowsports schools and their guests need. Increasing the difficulty of certification does not necessarily deliver a better product for schools, better serve members, nor meet the association's mission and vision. PSIA/AASI needs to evaluate what resources are available to ensure that the association is aligned with the needs of the guests and the needs of ski and snowboard schools, while providing valuable benefits to members.

Role of PSIA/AASI (p.15)

Implications: For respondents from large/destination resorts, the desired role of the association is clearly limited to education, training, and certification. Any suggestion that PSIA/AASI offer services outside of education and training—such as providing tools to assist with marketing of lessons or instructor recruitment—was received unenthusiastically. Respondents representing small/day resorts indicated they have limited internal resources to assist them with instructor recruiting and marketing of lessons, and feel the association has an obligation to help with these activities. However, they had difficulty articulating a collective solution to their problems and tend to want specific solutions for a wide range of area-specific problems.

Recommendations: PSIA/AASI needs to define for itself those things it can do well and have the discipline to say “no” to those it cannot. Therefore, PSIA/AASI should continue to pursue excellence in training and certification. PSIA/AASI should take care so that it is not distracted by a wide variety of individualized and impossible-to-address local problems. However, the association can meet the unique needs of smaller resorts by offering self-help marketing programs (like the well-received “Go With a Pro” initiative).

Perceptions of PSIA/AASI (p. 17)

When asked about their perceptions of the association, respondents listed four issues in need of improvement (in addition to the disconnects among the divisions):

1. Leadership and committees are too slow to embrace industry trends (p. 17).
2. Training is not meeting the needs of some resorts (p. 18).
3. The association relies too heavily on directors to recruit members (p. 20).
4. Communication between members and the association is not being optimized (p. 20).

Member Service and Education Programs (p. 22)

Implications: Respondents didn't distinguish national and divisional products. Materials produced are perceived to be a production of the entity “PSIA/AASI” and the nature of their origin (national or divisional) is largely irrelevant and therefore goes unnoticed. The respondents expressed that they value the education materials produced by PSIA/AASI, but they assert there is a perception of repetitiveness and competition that confuses members. The lack of awareness regarding the origin of publications reinforces the notion that members perceive PSIA/AASI as a single entity, not a divisional/national entity.

Recommendations: Association leadership should consider ways to clear out the clutter. A system of educational materials production should be agreed upon so that divisions and the national level complement each other and minimize overlap. This goes back to a need to agree on national standards for training and certification. Divisions and the national level need to reestablish unified content regarding topics for training, techniques taught, and processes for certification. This content should complement training delivered at the individual school level.



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Objective

PSIA/AASI initiated this research to identify opportunities for increasing the value of membership in, and snowsports school association with, PSIA/AASI. To achieve this goal, the research design addressed the following questions:

- Why is it good/not good to be associated with PSIA/AASI?
- What benefits or resources are lacking for snowsports school directors?
- Is PSIA/AASI membership and involvement supported and/or encouraged by area management?
- How does the PSIA/AASI certification process help or hinder the school's employee development?
- How accessible is PSIA/AASI?
- What are the directors' perceptions of PSIA/AASI's member services?

A copy of the discussion guide for this research is included in the Appendix.

Qualitative Research and Limitations

This report discusses a qualitative investigation into perspectives held by directors of ski and snowboard schools. Data were collected using qualitative methods (focus groups and phone interviews) and serves as a guide to various perceptions of PSIA/AASI and the role it plays for snowsports school directors. The result of this study is not a statistical representation of the perceptions of *all* snowsports school directors and may not be generalized to the larger population of directors. Such estimates can only be provided through a quantitative study.

Focus groups are in-depth qualitative interviews with a small number (six to eight) of carefully selected people brought together to discuss a host of topics. This research included three focus group discussion sessions, each lasting two hours. Respondents were separated into three distinct groups:

- Directors who represent small/day resorts
- Directors who represent large/destination resorts
- Directors who are also members of a national team

The discussions took place on September 8, 2005, in Golden, Colorado, and on October 22, 2005, at Copper Mountain, Colorado. The focus groups were designed, recruited, and moderated by MarketSpark, Inc. Additional phone interviews took place November 1–31, 2005, with directors who were unable to attend the meetings in Colorado. These interviews also were recruited and conducted by MarketSpark, Inc.

Respondent Sample

Respondents for the research were recruited from a randomly generated list of ski/snowboard school directors in the PSIA/AASI database. Respondents were chosen from this list and an effort made to represent geographically diverse areas as well as small and large resorts. Except for the group made up of national team members, directors with extensive ties to the national level (i.e., board members, past team members, and committee participants) were excluded. Non-member

schools were not recruited but are being considered for future research. A total of 25 directors participated.

INDUSTRY AND SNOWSPORTS SCHOOL CHALLENGES

The first step in understanding the respondents' perceptions of PSIA/AASI's value was to gain a clear understanding of the environment in which they operate. This information provided a foundation from which to analyze their feedback regarding the association and how well it serves their needs.

Biggest Changes in the Industry

Respondents were asked to discuss the most significant changes they have seen since they began working in the ski/snowboard industry. Three themes emerged:

1. *Ski and snowboard schools are big business.*

Many respondents commented that "back in the day" (10+ years ago) the most important skill a good ski/snowboard school director could have was the ability to ski or ride very well but that today the most important skill is business savvy. While skiing/riding skills are still important, they are no longer enough to make a director successful.

Participants noted that ski/snowboard schools are expected to make a substantial financial contribution to the bottom line of a resort. Even though the pressure to generate positive return on investment (ROI) is felt more deeply by directors who work for large corporations (e.g., Vail Resorts, Booth Creek, Intrawest), it is also felt by those who work for small independent resorts. Following are direct quotes on the topic from respondents.

"It's much more so about being a business than it is about being the best instructor or the best examiner. And when I started out, you needed to be an examiner before you could be the director. And that's not necessary anymore. If you can run a really good business, you're going to be more successful at this position than if you are the top instructor, especially in a large school."

"It is the idea of skiing and snowboarding schools becoming a revenue center. We were looked down upon as a necessary evil at the resort—especially snowboarding instructors—but now, resort managers are realizing that it's a revenue center. Pressure is put on us to produce revenue."

Implications: If PSIA/AASI takes revenue producers (front-line instructors, clinic leaders, team members, etc.) away from the area, particularly during peak times, then does the association compete with the goal of producing revenue? Does this provide additional incentive for areas to bring all training in-house in order to better manage labor? The potential exists for PSIA/AASI to compete with rather than complement local training. PSIA/AASI has evidence that in good snow years with high skier/snowboarder visits, clinics suffer because the instructors are all busy with lessons. In lean years, PSIA/AASI clinics do better because the instructors aren't needed as much on the hill.

Recommendations: Association leadership should define the extent to which PSIA/AASI products and services compete with area training and potentially increase the area's expense. In turn,



PSIA/AASI should create and communicate a clear value proposition—a clear statement of the tangible results a customer receives from using a product or service²— articulating how programs and services positively impact snowsports schools' performance³. PSIA/AASI needs to develop a message that clearly communicates the association's value to members, directors, and resort management. In particular, the message to directors should demonstrate how programs and services have a direct, positive effect on the snowsports school's bottom line (e.g., better training equals increased professionalism, resulting in higher customer satisfaction; support to offer contemporary lessons, such as park and pipe; customer service training modules that increase customer retention and repeat lessons). This information will help directors justify PSIA/AASI costs to instructors and resort management.

2. Snowboarding has changed what resorts offer.

Snowboarding has changed the industry in terms of equipment, culture, attitude, and expectations. Snowboarding gave rise to the freeride culture, which further reinvigorated snowsports and brought about new ways to have fun sliding on snow. While resorts are embracing the renewed sense of enjoyment this movement has brought to snowsports, they are also faced with troublesome risk management issues associated with freeriding, among other areas of activity (e.g., out-of-bounds, tree skiing, park and pipe). Here are some of the respondents' direct quotes on the subject.

"The first answer that kind of hit me was the snowboard aspect and how that's impacted us from the freeride, the park and pipe, and the terrain aspects. If you go back 20 years we all remember when every lump and bump on a hill had a bamboo pole over it. And now they're flying 40 or 50 feet over obstacles and we're building it for them. That has changed our customer base... the attitude and the culture that has gone along with it. It is a much riskier business now and we struggle to keep up."

² In business, a value proposition is a clear and specific statement summarizing the customer segment, competitor targets, and the core differentiation of one's product from the offerings of competitors. In *Crossing the Chasm*, Geoffrey Moore writes, "Positioning is the single largest influence on the buying decision." Value propositions are often used to describe value added. Moore's value proposition should answer the questions: "Why should I buy *this* product or service?" as well as "Why should I do anything at all?" The following is a template for creating a value proposition, also referred to as a positioning statement. Note the first portion of the value proposition asserts the value of the offering and the second sentence asserts the positioning of that value.

- For (target customer)
- who (statement of the need or opportunity),
- the (product/service name) is a (product/service category)
- that (statement of benefit).
- Unlike (primary competitive alternative),
- our product (statement of primary differentiation).

The real foundation of developing a unique value proposition rests on identifying and understanding what an individual or group values, which can be both stated and/or implied. For example, business executives can talk about integrity, honesty, and corporate governance all they want, but if their actions conflict with their rhetoric, we should look to what they actually do as a true representation of their values. If a customer says price is not important, but they continue to buy on price, the actual should trump the intents.

³ Directors also expressed a great need for business and operational training in the *2001 Survey of Heads of Ski and Snowboard Instructional Programs*, conducted by Heimbach Research.



Implications: The popularity of snowboarding has given rise to a freeride culture in skiing and snowboarding that resorts are struggling to embrace. Snowsports schools are trying to develop ways to manage risk as well as lessons in terrain parks and halfpipes. Youth culture is in ascendance relative to traditional European-based alpine culture as evidenced by X-Games and recent Olympic coverage. This influences product and service delivery and development.

Recommendations: In terms of resource allocation and attention, AASI is still perceived as a “stepchild” to PSIA—particularly at the division level⁴—while snowboarding and freeriding have become mainstream. Recognizing that the old levels of (alpine) hierarchy don’t necessarily represent the same value, relevance, or needs of the new generation, new talent within the association needs to be fostered and allowed to be in charge of their own destiny. If this issue is not addressed, PSIA/AASI will be over-serving a mature market focused on an aging generation of skiers while failing to serve emerging markets. PSIA/AASI needs to anticipate how the current training standards fit into this world of snowboarding and freeriding. Association leadership needs to invest in programs and services so that AASI and the freeride culture is a priority rather than an afterthought, and not an issue that is shoehorned into the traditional alpine model.

3. Customers are more demanding.

Respondents said they believe the skiing and snowboarding public has developed higher expectations of the snowsports experience over the past decade. They feel that customers expect skiing/snowboarding to be a recreation or vacation, and something that is relatively easy for the whole family to learn together. Many respondents said they often feel pressure to teach someone to “ski well in a few hours.” This is consistent with cultural norms related to instant gratification, sampling, time poverty, and shorter attention spans. Comments on this topic include the following:

“It is kind of a change in our customers in terms of what they want to achieve. Our competition nowadays isn’t so much other ski and snowboard areas as it is almost any recreational activity out there: water parks and such.... People want to spend one day having fun skiing, they don’t want to take the time to learn it. It is our challenge to make lessons more family friendly.”

“I call it the ‘theme park syndrome.’ People are coming out to learn how to ski and snowboard and they think that it’s a theme park. They’re surprised that it takes work and effort, and they’re disappointed that they can’t get on a ride and enjoy it immediately. They don’t like to spend the time that it takes to learn how to ski or snowboard. They quit or they stay for the day, but they don’t come back because it’s too much work.”

Implications: Ski/snowboard school directors are struggling with how to get first-time customers to take more than one lesson and how to keep the entire experience family friendly.

Recommendations: Training for PSIA/AASI members should continually integrate methods that will help instructors ensure that first-timers and families have fun and return, rather than turn lessons into mini clinics or exams due to the association’s example.

⁴ This finding doesn’t refer to quantity of materials developed by the association at the national and divisional level but to the perceived segregation between PSIA and AASI at the local level. Further, a review of division websites and the emphasis placed on traditional alpine skiing may reinforce this perception.



Challenges Faced by Directors

Respondents were asked to describe the biggest challenges they face in their job on a day-to-day basis. Two themes emerged:

1. Recruiting and retention of instructors is increasingly difficult⁵.

Recruiting and retaining a qualified instructor base is an exceptionally difficult and ongoing challenge for directors of ski/snowboard schools at both large and small resorts. The majority of respondents indicated that, although not as daunting as recruiting, maintaining a solid training staff is also a major concern.

Staff Recruiting

The demand for qualified ski and snowboard instructors currently outpaces supply. Directors say that they face a challenge at the beginning of every season to “get enough warm bodies” on the hill teaching skiing and snowboarding. Most believe that this is function of the industry, and that the seasonality and relatively low pay of the job prevents people from viewing ski/snowboard instruction as anything but a temporary position. Thus directors find themselves recruiting an almost entirely new staff every season. Comments on this topic included the following:

“It used to be, in the early 80s, I remember sitting at a job fair with a stack of applications a mile high for six jobs. Now the stack is like a half-inch high for 10 jobs. It’s been a big swing in the last 20 years.”

“Recruiting is the biggest issue. I mean for us there are 3,000 instructors needed in a 45-minute radius. Just trying to find a mix of instructors is very difficult when you need that many instructors in that small of an area.”

Additionally, respondents indicated they struggle to recruit staffing levels that are in sync with demand. Some find it difficult to recruit part-time staff for weekends and holidays, while others struggle to recruit full-time staff for the whole season.

“For us, being somewhat close to a metropolitan area, finding a weekend warrior that will teach weekends and holidays is not that tough. But finding that individual who wants to commit to working 5 to 6 days a week as a full-time instructor is harder because they can’t make a living doing it.”

“I can’t find anybody to work part-time. I could hire a hundred part-time instructors if I could find them. The closest metropolitan area is 2½ hours away. I need people who can commit to working weekends or just holidays, and I can’t find them.”

⁵ This concern is also expressed in key findings from the *2001 Survey of Heads of Ski and Snowboard Instructional Programs*, conducted by Heimbach Research.



Staff Retention

Respondents suggested that, due to the low pay and lack of benefits, many instructors leave the profession after a few years to “get a real job” that will allow them to afford the quality of life they desire. This trend has led to age polarization within the instructor force: Most instructors are either young and right out of college (23–28 years old) or older or retired (55+ years old). According to respondents, very few people in their 30s and 40s are able to make a living and support a family as an instructor. On the part-time front, many in these age groups have higher priorities related to family and career that dissuade them from continuing to work as part-time instructors. Most respondents say they do not expect to be able to retain an employee for more than two to three years⁶.

“We have the same example in the school I work with. The staff is aging; they are retired and just think about doing this for a few years. Then you have the other ones, the students... they move on. So that middle thing is missing. Skiing or snowboarding in our resort is all high price and they can’t afford it. They can’t afford housing. Neither the young nor the old are inclined to stay very long, so we just have to keep recruiting and recruiting.”

“Some of the biggest challenges for us are to keep the instructors in long enough to become good instructors. I think it takes five or six years for instructors to really hone their skills and a lot of them are only in it for one or two, and then they leave. It’s harder to keep people around to the point where they’re well-developed, fully certified instructors. *You get one to three years and they’re out.*”

Respondents also emphasized that the challenge of recruiting and retention is not an association problem but an industry problem.

Implications: The recruiting and retention crisis in ski/snowboard schools undoubtedly has a negative effect on PSIA/AASI’s membership growth. If resorts are not able to retain instructors, the association will see similar trends in membership (i.e., members dropping out after two to three years, age polarization, and a large amount of new members each season who may not be familiar with the association and its goals). This will be particularly difficult if PSIA/AASI appeals to the established membership without focusing on the needs of incoming membership. The “one size fits all” approach will not be effective.

Recommendations: PSIA/AASI need to be clear about its role in recruiting members as opposed to recruiting employees.

2. Maintaining a consistent level of high-quality, well-trained instructors is increasingly difficult.

The respondents indicated that training issues center on two challenges:

1. Lack of customer service training programs
2. Justification of the cost of PSIA/AASI certification (primarily clinics)

⁶ The qualitative *Membership Motivations and Satisfaction Research 2002*, conducted by Heimbach Research, suggests that membership in PSIA/AASI is driven by the decision to become an instructor, which varies depending on the life stage of the person.



Directors said they understand how vital customer service skills are to their programs but struggle to integrate these skills into their training. Here is a direct comment on the topic:

“I manage customer service training the most of anything... we try to weave soft skills into our PSIA/AASI clinics. That is where I find the challenge is. Our instructors are motivated to learn better *skiing skills*, not better *customer service skills*. But the ones who get it (customer service) make the better instructors. If we could figure out a way to really teach customers service skills, we would have a more successful program.”

Clinic Expense

Some respondents said the cost of attending PSIA/AASI clinics is a deterrent to getting training for some instructors, although comments didn't necessarily focus on the out-of-pocket expenses for clinics. Travel costs and the opportunity cost of lost wages make it difficult for directors to convince instructors that pursuing another level of training is worthwhile.

“Some instructors are motivated by learning, but for others, cost is a big issue. It is hard to convince them that the training is worth it. Our pay scale is linked to certification, and depending on how much more they get when they come back next year certified, it may or may not be worth it. It may be a couple hundred or three hundred dollars to attend a clinic to move from one level to the next. But then when you come back it's only a buck raise. The cost benefit, the ROI (return on investment)... yeah it's an issue.”

“When you add the opportunity cost to the cost of attending a clinic, it is a big deal. Not only do you fork out a few hundred bucks to go, but also you miss a couple of days teaching. That's money not earned. If you have a full-time job, then it's almost worse. I mean with the divisionary certification process, you have a three-day prep, three-day exams you're looking at. If you are a part-timer and you have a job in the real world, you're looking at six days off possibly because the majority of events are midweek. Then you've got travel, hotel, food, and the events themselves.”

Implications: Respondents appear to be unable or unwilling to articulate a value of training beyond pay increases. This is particularly difficult if PSIA/AASI is a substitute—as opposed to a supplement—for in-house training. There is also inherent conflict between directors who value customer service skills versus snow-sliding skills. The perceived (and unnecessary) tradeoff between skiing/riding skills and customer service skills is problematic. PSIA/AASI will be challenged to overcome the real and perceived costs of training without diminishing quality, especially if area management provides meager financial reward for increased certification. Financial pressure will likely decrease the ability and incentive of directors to offer financial incentive for passing certification.

Recommendations: PSIA/AASI needs to communicate the cultural value of certification that speaks directly to snowsports school directors in a way that moves beyond pay as a sole motivator, continuing to emphasize skiing/riding skills in balance with customer service skills.



THE VALUE OF PSIA/AASI

Training and Certification

The snowsports school directors who participated in the study said they perceive the primary value of PSIA/AASI to be “a consistent, nationwide standard of training and certification.” All respondents indicated that this is an extremely compelling reason to be a member school, as noted in the following quotes.

“I would struggle to find a reason to not be associated. I believe strongly in PSIA and AASI and support that deeply. Do I have issues? Yes, a long list. But not being associated isn't really an option in my opinion. We are going to be member schools because we support the overall purpose of it and it helps us to do our work more effectively.”

“I think all of us are supportive of the organization. It's kind of like it's the only thing we've got. We've got to rally around it and we've got to create support. I worked for a ski school that actually was going down the road of being their own thing. I found that to be disruptive with the pros. There was a big disconnect, the vernacular began to change. And I found it difficult to try and support one or the other when working for the company and having my paycheck coming from them, yet I'm still recruiting and the kids want to know if they gain certification can they go work for Vail. And so the training that I am providing through the educational materials of PSIA has value for them not only in the United States but around the world.”

The following themes emerged in the context of discussion about training and certification:

1. Disconnects undermine the value of the association.

In spite of acknowledging the benefits of affiliation and indicating they are supportive of PSIA/AASI, respondents implied a weak connection to the association because of the lack of real alternatives. Further, the perceived key benefit⁷ is undermined because of the perceived disconnects among the divisions as well as between the national level and the divisions. Respondents said they believe these disconnects cause inconsistencies in clinics and exams, and are leading to a breakdown of the national standard for certification.

A major frustration of all the respondents is their belief that the divisions of PSIA/AASI are not communicating with each other or with the national level. This lack of communication creates the perception of an inefficient association that struggles to move forward. What once was perceived as the primary benefit of the association—“a consistent, nationwide standard of training and certification”—has eroded over time⁸. This perceived benefit is undermined by a disconnect among the divisions as well as between the national level and the divisions. Philosophical differences and lack of communication are leading to inconsistencies in accepted training content, clinic

⁷ “a consistent, nationwide standard of training and certification.”

⁸ The 2002 *Survey of Member Motivations and Satisfaction* reveals a similar sentiment from members: “Too much variance in the skills delivered within any certification level erodes respect for the system....” “Too often arbitrary and inconsistent grading on exams (some lesser people pass when other, better people fail, because of different examiners—and since the cost is so much more. This is very, very frustrating....”



performance, and exam processes. This is resulting in an inability to identify meaningful national standards⁹. Here are some direct comments on these issues:

“The management structure of PSIA creates a lot of problems. It’s all based upon committees. And these committees are all meeting both in Central and Rocky, and somebody is trying to coordinate these committees and it doesn’t seem like they’re doing a very good job. It’s not because they’re not trying; it’s just the way the organization is structured. It’s a management nightmare. Everyone does their own thing and has no idea what national or other divisions are doing.”

“The biggest thing that makes PSIA ineffective is that they can’t agree on anything. Right now each division is doing its own thing instead of working together, for all of us. From division to division it has to be my way or the highway, and as a group that is what slows us down.”

“I think what’s slowing us down is the fractionalized divisions. They just don’t ever talk to one another or agree on the best way to do something. I also think they ignore each other, ignore national, and do their own thing. Every division is doing something different so none of us are improving in the ways that are important to us.”

Respondents believe this communication breakdown results in inconsistencies in training as well as confusion over policies, procedures, and costs. Respondents indicated that this disconnect has created a reality where there are different training procedures in each division and thus PSIA/AASI no longer has a true national standard for training and certification.

“Where are our national standards if Rocky Mountain, Intermountain, Central, and Eastern all have different training standards? So, it’s really not a national standard.”

“One of the biggest disconnects for me is that the standards for the credentials are different in the different divisions. Take the timeframes for example: In the Intermountain division I think we are the smallest, it is only a two-day process to get level III qualified and there are separate tests. But I know it takes longer in other divisions, why is that? Isn’t a level III a level III?”

“For me the disconnect is in the language that is being spoken. When we talk, instead of core concepts we talk GCT (guest centered teaching). We talk three steps in success instead of rotary edge pressure. Those are direct disconnects between national and all the divisions and our division. And I think it’s a huge problem especially when you consider a guest might learn to ski in one region and travel to another resort and be taught totally differently. Or an instructor might get certified in one division and move to another and have to learn everything all over again.”

“I’ve got two issues with certification. First, it’s inconsistent among the divisions. I’ve worked in three different PSIA divisions and there’s a huge contrast. Level III has additional requirements in the Rocky Mountain Division. Rocky Mountain Division uses an entirely different teaching model than any other division that I’m aware of in the country. I know that

⁹ This is also expressed in key findings from the *2001 Survey of Heads of Ski and Snowboard Instructional Programs*, conducted by Heimbach Research: “Directors project that there is much misunderstanding of cost, processes, and certification levels of PSIA/AASI.”



some of things they're trying to be progressive on, but at the same time, if we're a nationwide organization there has to be consistency. Because going from Intermountain to Rocky Mountain, if someone started their level III training process in Intermountain and moved to Rocky Mountain, they're starting over. It's almost that different. There is no consistency to this across the board, and there needs to be amongst the examiners in terms of what is a pass and what is a fail. Amongst the trainers... what standard are they training to."

"The examiners themselves and how they score varies from division to division. It's a different template for how an exam is administered in different divisions. It even varies from examiner to examiner within a division."

Implications: These disconnects have the potential to break down the very foundation of the association. If snowsports school directors (and others within the industry) believe PSIA/AASI no longer has a true national standard for training and certification, then the primary value of association does not exist¹⁰. Without a clear value, the negative effect of actual and opportunity cost is magnified¹¹. Directors feel compelled to be part of PSIA/AASI, though one can argue it is because there is no viable alternative—not a particularly strong position. While respondents still feel compelled to be part of the association, the lack of a true value proposition is making it increasingly difficult for them to convince resort management and instructor staff of the association's importance.

Recommendations: PSIA/AASI should explore ways to facilitate communication and agreement on national standards that meet the needs of areas. Divisions should to come to terms with their differences and find areas of agreement.

ROLE OF PSIA/AASI

Instructor Education and Training

Directors view the primary role of PSIA/AASI as providing training and education to instructors. More than 80 percent of all respondents named this as the primary job of the association and said the majority, if not all, of the association's resources should be devoted to this purpose.

"Training and education is the mission of PSIA. It is what creates value for members. This is the value that is tangible and meaningful."

"You have to be a full-time organization to develop quality training material. Most of our areas are open 100 days or less a year. You can't develop that type of training. You can develop your own program from the materials provided, but you need a national organization to develop that type of information. That's why this association exists and that is what it should spend its efforts doing."

¹⁰ The *2002 Survey of Member Motivations and Satisfaction* points to the effect on members as well: "The vast majority of respondents mentioned 'to get certified' as a primary reason for joining."

¹¹ From the *2002 Survey of Member Motivations and Satisfaction*: "Cost of clinics and exams is very often perceived as being too high, particularly when requiring overnight travel and lost income by not being able to work during those days...."



Selling Lessons and Recruiting Instructors

Despite widespread agreement that selling lessons and recruiting are key challenges for all schools, there is a notable disagreement between the ski/snowboard school directors of large and small areas when it comes to their views of PSIA/AASI's role in addressing these challenges. Large resorts do not wish to see PSIA/AASI utilize resources to address these issues. Small resorts, on the other hand, believe PSIA/AASI's role extends to support in these areas.

Large/Destination Resorts

For respondents from large/destination resorts, the desired role of the association is clearly limited to education, training, and certification. Any suggestion that PSIA/AASI offer services outside of education and training—such as providing tools to assist with marketing of lessons or instructor recruitment—was received unenthusiastically. These respondents said they feel any effort by PSIA/AASI to market to the public would not be received well by resort management as it had the possibility to infringe upon the resort's own branding.

“The branding and marketing is incredibly important, that is, how you brand your school and what images you use. For some of us here we have the resources to help us do that. In my case it is done with very clear direction from me in what it is we are looking for. Also, the vice president of marketing comes from a ski school background. He and I will work very closely together with the agency to get the look we want. I wouldn't welcome any PSIA marketing about my instructors for that reason.”

“I think that, hands down, training versus marketing is the function of PSIA. Honestly, I just don't think that PSIA has the resources to go out and make a dent in the marketplace and get the word out about a need to take a lesson or the branding of PSIA to the general public. It would take significant resources to make any kind of mark or move the meter in the marketplace to get that brand out there. Given the resources of PSIA, I have to say the function of training is the most important thing it can provide to us as member schools. I think training has to be the priority.”

Small/Day Areas

Respondents representing small/day resorts tend to see a broader role for the association. They feel the association should allocate resources to support directors with other challenges in addition to education and training. These respondents indicated they have limited internal resources to assist them with instructor recruiting¹² and marketing of lessons, and feel the association has an obligation to help with these activities. However, they had difficulty articulating a collective solution to their problems and tend to want specific solutions for a wide range of area-specific problems. When asked to elaborate as to what assistance in selling lessons and recruiting might look like, respondents described posters, brochures, and other printed collateral they could use at the resort or at job fairs. No one mentioned promoting higher-level instructors (i.e., level III instructors) over non-certified instructors, and most said they believe PSIA/AASI does not have the resources to mount an effective marketing effort to the general public through traditional media.

¹² The 2002 *Secret Shopper* research addressing the process to become an instructor and join PSIA/AASI revealed that each resort has a different process and qualifications for becoming an instructor. This research also pointed to the wide range of requirements, process, and service by PSIA/AASI divisions in responding to inquiries by potential members.



There was neither a consensus as to who should be the audience for any PSIA/AASI marketing effort nor agreement regarding what the outcome of a successful marketing effort would look like. In some cases, the respondent preferred to offload the responsibility for putting a quality instructor on the hill to PSIA/AASI rather than take on the responsibility themselves or even assert a partnership.

“Right now I work with my marketing department at my resort to sell lessons. That means there are two of us working on this, that is all. All ideas and tools are provided by us. If PSIA can get the word out and help bring more guests to the resort (whether they take lessons or not) it helps me. Give me TOOLS to work with.”

“Most of our customers don’t know what PSIA is or does for us. They don’t know instructors go through training to put out a good quality product. Our customers think all we do is teach beginners and kids. I think if we were maybe advertised a bit better, maybe more people would take lessons from us. We just don’t have the resources to do this.”

“Clearly, for directors, recruiting is our main issue. I think that as a member organization, PSIA should help us in this. If they could provide recruiting tools that make it look cool to be an instructor, that would go a long way toward helping us get instructors.”

Implications: The common denominator for all areas is providing a consistent, nationwide standard of training and certification. Additionally, large and small areas appear to be willing to cooperate with recruiting efforts, provided they are given resources and materials by PSIA/AASI to do so. PSIA/AASI will be challenged to solve a local area’s issues, and will have a difficult time meeting these expectations.

Recommendations: PSIA/AASI needs to define for itself those things it can do well and have the discipline to say “no” to those it cannot. Therefore, PSIA/AASI should continue to pursue excellence in training and certification. PSIA/AASI should take care so that it is not distracted by a wide variety of individualized and impossible-to-address local problems. However, the association can meet the unique needs of smaller resorts by offering self-help marketing programs (like the well-received “Go With a Pro” initiative).

PERCEPTIONS OF PSIA/AASI

When asked about their perceptions of the association, respondents listed four issues in need of improvement (in addition to the disconnects among the divisions):

1. Leadership and committees are too slow to embrace industry trends (p. 17).
2. Training is not meeting the needs of some resorts (p. 18).
3. The association relies too heavily on directors to recruit members (p. 20).
4. Communication between members and the association is not being optimized (p. 20).

Response to Market Trends

Some respondents said they feel PSIA/AASI’s leadership (at the division and national level) is too slow to embrace market trends, citing two related examples: the prevalence of snowboarding and the demand for children’s instruction.



“Over 30% of my business is coming from snowboard lessons and the association is still mostly run by alpine skiers. I don’t see the quality of AASI catching up to the alpine standards yet.”

“Forty percent of my business is from snowboarding, but PSIA/AASI pays very little attention to snowboarding. I wonder how many snowboarders are in positions of management at PSIA/AASI. The leadership is lacking. The whole organization needs more attention to snowboarding and freeriding. It’s just not about alpine racing anymore, its just *not!*”

“My perception is that PSIA is perhaps a little bit slow to respond to industry trends, particularly with park and pipe and all that stuff. Yeah, we’ve had to drive a lot of the training of our staff ourselves. PSIA, you know, is constantly playing catch-up.”

“The market is moving more toward kids and freestyle. The children’s accreditations and the pipe accreditations are great first steps. We need to solidify those and create reasons for freeriders to take lessons and ways to teach people safe riding in the pipe. Can PSIA help develop training that will do this for us, or are they going to sit around and wait?”

Implications: Perceptions about the association’s inability to embrace industry trends persist¹³. These feelings may be perpetuated by the local level¹⁴. Respondents said they feel PSIA/AASI is out of touch with the needs of resorts and is perceived, at times, to be developing haphazard, self-serving training requirements. Some respondents find the association is unable to respond to member feedback designed to improve training.

Recommendations: When addressing industry trends, the association (the national level and divisions collectively) needs to determine how it will identify when a trend has perpetuated through the industry enough to warrant PSIA/AASI input, and how to best serve members and help snowsports schools adapt and adjust to those trends. As an aside, the development and delivery of park and pipe-related materials is an excellent example of the association’s timeliness and responsiveness.

Training and Certification Effectiveness for Resorts

Another frustration the respondents expressed was that new, division-sponsored certification policies are failing to meet the needs of resorts. One example cited was the freeride certification required for level III in the Rocky Mountain Division. While all respondents acknowledge the need to offer freeride instruction, directors in the Rocky Mountain Division said they feel the requirement as it stands today compromises their core business of teaching “parallel turns on groomers” and causes many older, valuable instructors to quit.

“For us, having a freeride certification could be a plus, if done in the right way. The problem is Rocky Mountain has made freeride a required element of core certification. That makes

¹³ This concern is also expressed in key findings from the *2001 Survey of Heads of Ski and Snowboard Instructional Programs*, conducted by Heimbach Research.

¹⁴ From the *Winter 2006 NW Snowsport Instructor*, p. 17 “Along with being slow to embrace snowboarding, abandon our stretchpants, and address the influence of shaped skis, our organization has most recently been slow to establish a leadership position in developing and providing freestyle terrain park education.”



no sense to us! The bulk of our customers want nothing more than to be able to do parallel turns or to navigate moguls. So from a business point-of-view, I don't need the bulk of my instructors to have skills to teach in freeride, I need really good instructors who can teach parallel turns. The problem is that now my level III's have to pass a test in freeride skills, and not all of them can do it, or want to do it, so they quit! They drop out and I lose them. It is not a small problem for me. I am losing a lot of good instructors because of this requirement, which most of my customers don't care about yet. It makes no sense."

"The freeride certification does not work as part of the core requirements. I like the idea of it as a separate certification, but as part of the core certification it is a pain in the ass. I have my older instructors saying to me that 'to teach my customers, I don't need to do halfpipe. They don't go on it and I don't need to teach it. There are other guys who like to teach it. Have them do it, but don't make me learn it.' If someone has a desire to teach in the pipe and has hot feet, great—let's give them that accreditation. But putting it in the exam is closing the door on a lot of people. My older guys are quitting because of it."

"I think it is really important for PSIA to know that the training and certification is discriminating against our older instructors. The park and pipe work and racing requirements are pushing these guys out, and none of us can afford to have them leave. They are the best instructors I have."

Another example given of perceived shortcomings in training and certification was one division's unwillingness to pursue a certification program in children's instruction that would address the increase in demand for children's lessons:

"With the renewed level of children coming in, I need more instructors who can deal with kids. I need a children's certification. I don't see our division or national addressing that at all. We have been pursuing a children's certification for years. There are special techniques that instructors should use when teaching children and unique safety issues they have to be aware of. We have had to develop a training program just for teaching kids, and I know we are not the only resort that has done this on its own. I don't know why PSIA has shown no interest whatsoever in helping us develop a special certification in kids' instruction."

Implications: There appears to be a perception that PSIA/AASI is out of touch with the needs of resorts and is perceived, at times, to be developing haphazard training requirements. PSIA/AASI needs to ensure that it is providing appropriate levels of training for the member commensurate with what snowsports schools and their guests need.

Recommendations: Increasing the difficulty of certification does not necessarily deliver a better product for schools, better serve members, or meet the association's mission and vision¹⁵. PSIA/AASI needs to evaluate what resources are available to ensure that the association is aligned with the needs of the guests and the needs of ski and snowboard schools, while providing valuable benefits to members.

¹⁵ Members expressed this weakness in the *2002 Survey of PSIA Membership Motivations*: "AASI is evolving into an overly complicated process following PSIA with having more hoops and overly rigid expectations that are beyond the reality of AASI's needed service delivery."



Recruitment Responsibilities

Respondents said they believe the association places the burden for recruiting new members on the shoulders of ski/snowboard school directors. Once directors recruit new instructors, they have to educate them about PSIA/AASI because awareness among new instructors is so low¹⁶. Many respondents said they feel it is unfair for PSIA/AASI to expect directors to recruit their membership for them.

“I’ll take the responsibility for recruiting instructors to my resort. PSIA’s responsibility as a nonprofit, membership-driven institution is to encourage pros to join the organization. That shouldn’t be my job. PSIA does nothing to help me with that. I find that discouraging.”

“I’ll get the instructors—that’s my job, it’s my business. But then this is a membership organization. I would like to see PSIA at the divisional or national level come to my school once recruiting is done and do recruiting for PSIA. That is not happening at all.”

“I don’t know if it is divisional or if it’s driven nationally or what, but in terms of recruiting into PSIA our division does nothing, so we do all the recruiting to drive pros into PSIA or AASI memberships. I have so many other things I need to be doing. A little help from PSIA driving membership would be appreciated.”

Implications: If directors feel PSIA/AASI defaults to them to recruit, they don’t feel supported, and therefore may be less inclined to deliver a favorable message to their employees and management about PSIA/AASI¹⁷.

Recommendations: The association should provide snowsports school directors with a PSIA/AASI value proposition that goes beyond the “pay increase” benefit. While serving the existing membership, PSIA/AASI divisions need to agree on value propositions that appeal to new members and deliver them consistently. At the national level, PSIA/AASI may need to develop a recruiting and retention campaign with messages that can be adapted locally for use by divisions and areas.

Communication Between Members and Association

A number of respondents said there is a weak communication loop between the membership and the leadership of PSIA/AASI. Respondents indicated that while they feel the division and national staff is accessible and helpful for specific requests (e.g., order taking, clinic or event-related questions), there is room for improvement in the area of feedback. Respondents suggested that while there *are* channels of communication, these channels are not designed to accept and use feedback from members.

“They give you the phone numbers. You can call them, you can mail them, you can e-mail them. But actually getting your opinions and your concerns voiced with any of the committees is very difficult. That’s just my perspective. I don’t know whether it’s divisional or

¹⁶ The *2002 Membership Motivation and Satisfaction Survey* and the *2003 Sponsorship Research* concluded that association awareness is extremely low outside of membership.

¹⁷ From the *2002 Survey of PSIA Membership Motivations and Satisfaction*: “A prerequisite for joining PSIA or AASI is to become aware of the organization, and for most new instructors, awareness of PSIA/AASI appears to occur in an uncontrolled, very haphazard and, essentially, accidental manner.”



national. You can click and contact the committee e-mails and whatnot, and my instructors have the same complaint—it's being able to access some of the people who make the decisions. You send feedback to a committee and they sit on it and that is the end of it."

"On the rare occasion that they [PSIA leadership] ask for input, they get it but they never do anything with it. It goes into the black hole, never to be acknowledged again."

Respondents also noted several examples of communication breakdowns among PSIA/AASI, resort management, and ski/snowboard school directors. (Note, prior research also supports this conclusion.¹⁸)

"We have had clinics scheduled without prior clearance, if you will. They say we would like to come in January. I say okay, let me get that cleared because you are going to want lift tickets... things like that. So I get it cleared and they change the date to February and don't tell me, and all of a sudden my resort management is flipping out because there is a clinic here and everyone wants free tickets and I am clueless."

"All of a sudden you find out there is going to be a clinic at your resort and no one called ahead of time to ask, they just show up. That creates so many headaches I cannot even tell you. I hate it when they do that."

Respondents also expressed frustration with the inability to get correct information from the national office and the divisions about membership status.

"I have tried to contact them and get information out of the database about who is paid up and who isn't, and they can't even tell me."

"I can't even get national or the division to tell me who is current and who isn't. I don't think they know. I think their database is not current."

"So how do we regulate and police memberships? We find it difficult to actually find out who is current by resort. The names are jumbled together and the databases are difficult to access. We hear a lot of feedback about the staff trying to get information, but it is difficult, and they know their data is totally jumbled. What I don't understand is why, if they know it, they don't do something about it."

Implications: For many respondents, the inability to access current membership information in the database is a tangible example of the communication breakdown in the association.

Recommendations: At the most basic level, PSIA/AASI needs to provide member schools database access that helps them verify membership through the websites. The association also needs to develop a two-way communication feedback loop where action is taken based on member input.

¹⁸ The *2002 Membership Satisfaction Survey and the Heads of Ski & Snowboard Instruction Programs Research* concluded that PSIA/AASI does not communicate adequately with resort management and ski/snowboard schools.



REACTION TO MEMBER SERVICES

Respondents were asked to brainstorm a list of the services provided by PSIA/AASI. For most respondents the first things mentioned were training and education materials and clinics. Many members were also able to list the national teams and some of the communication channels, specifically the magazines and the websites. Other services were lesser known and only recognized when mentioned by the moderator.

	Large/Destination Resorts	Small/Day Resorts
Services Mentioned Unaided	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education materials (manuals/videos) • The pin • Clinics • Teams • National Academy • Website • Pro deals • Catalog • Insurance • <i>The Pro Rider</i> • <i>The Professional Skier</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manuals for teaching • Website • Videos • Clinics • Logo wear • Teams • <i>The Pro Rider</i> • <i>The Professional Skier</i>
Services Recognized After Mention by Moderator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional events • Special Clinics • Tip Cards • Go With A Pro • Heads Up 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Division Newsletter • National Academy • Pro forms • Go With a Pro • Marketing Materials

The Perceived Role of the National Teams

The respondents appear to view the role and responsibilities of the national teams in the same way as the PSIA/AASI national board (see Appendix A). However, they expressed strong opinions that the teams should do more to support the education efforts of the divisions at the individual member school level. Specifically, the respondents said they do not feel they have the access they need, or used to have, to members of the national team in terms of ski clinics for their instructors at their home mountains. Many respondents, especially those representing small/day resorts, indicated that skiing with a team member is often the best training available to their instructors.

“Access to high-level training is really difficult for a small resort. PSIA providing more of that by getting team members out to resort would be a great help. If I picked up the phone and said I’d pay a couple hundred bucks and expenses... yeah, they’d probably come. But I think it should be part of the program that we have access to them.”

“Do we still have it? The D-Team? That’s my question. What benefit are we deriving from them right now? They don’t come out to the schools. If they were to come out to the schools and train our supervisors and our training staff, it would be very powerful. I’ve tried to bring



our D-team members to the resort, but they end up skiing only with the examiners, not with the instructor base—and that is who needs to see them. A day of skiing with a team member can be a huge motivator to an instructor.”

“As a small resort, I’d say that a day skiing with a D-Team member is the best training my staff is going to get. We need more of that. They should be more accessible to us.”

Some respondents said they feel the national teams are not getting as much publicity as they used to and that they believe this to be detrimental to the awareness of PSIA/AASI within the industry.

“There was time when you saw them everywhere. There used to be real value in that. I don’t see them anywhere anymore. I don’t even know who they are.”

“The biggest point that I want to make is that they need to write. They need publicity. That’s how you can communicate with the most people. They just are not getting the exposure that they used to.”

Implications: There is some question as to what constitutes success when it comes to team involvement and exposure, especially given the prominent role the teams play in national publications. The respondents place high importance on instructor exposure to national team members and believe the teams should be interacting more with individual member schools. Many feel that increased access to the teams would go a long way toward increasing the value of the association.

Recommendations: To increase the perceived value of the association and the teams, association leadership should consider building the cost of team clinics into dues for member schools. This dues increase must be accompanied by a process that makes it much easier for groups of schools to book team members. Additionally, PSIA/AASI leadership should consider options for making it easier for the teams to sell clinics directly.

Education Materials

Respondents generally indicated that they feel the education materials produced by PSIA/AASI are of a high quality, especially the training manuals. There were, however, comments that there is an overabundance of materials (i.e., too many videos, too many pamphlets teaching the same thing) and resulting confusion about who produces which training materials.

“So some people in the west will get that one (DVD) and then somebody brought in one from Rocky Mountain that I was using a little bit last spring. Then some guys in PSIA West—some demo team members—made some DVDs of their own. We’re just picking and choosing, like that bowl of M&Ms. I don’t know who produces what, but it’s all PSIA.”

“It’s just kind of frustrating that there are so many videos about the same thing. It seems like they waste resources producing a bunch of different videos on that same topic and then they say they don’t have money to produce other videos that we actually really need on different topics like teaching kids or a beginners guide to instruction.”

Implications: It was notable that these respondents didn’t distinguish national and divisional products. In general all materials produced are perceived to be a production of the entity “PSIA/AASI” and the nature of their origin (national or divisional) is largely irrelevant and therefore goes unnoticed. The respondents expressed that they value the education materials produced by



PSIA/AASI, but they assert there is a perception of repetitiveness and competition that confuses members. The lack of awareness regarding the origin of publications reinforces the notion that members perceive PSIA/AASI as a single entity, not a divisional/national entity. This lack of differentiation further undermines the value proposition of a consistent, nationwide standard of training and certification.

Recommendations: Association leadership should consider ways to clear out the clutter. A system of educational materials production should be agreed upon so that divisions and the national level complement each other and minimize overlap. This goes back to a need to agree on national standards for training and certification. Divisions and the national level need to reestablish unified content regarding topics for training, techniques taught, and processes for certification.

Communication Pieces

Magazines

Most respondents were aware of *The Pro Rider* and *The Professional Skier* magazines. There was some question about how many people actually read them, who publishes them, and whether or not the database of recipients is up to date. While the respondents indicated that they appreciate the content of the magazines and websites, they question how many members have the time to read the magazines or have access to the websites, especially during the busy season¹⁹.

“I wonder about the database for [the magazine]. I have snowboard instructors who get *The Professional Skier*. I think that is a database mix-up. But then someone told me [the national office] did that on purpose.”

“There are two magazines, and I think they are a national thing, but I don’t know. I am not sure how many instructors actually read them, but they are out there. For me it is hard to find time to read them and then I don’t always know what is going on in the association.

Websites

There was general awareness of the national and divisional websites, and most respondents said they find the content on the websites useful. In spite of appreciating the content, most respondents indicated that the websites are underutilized. Most instructors don’t have regular access to the web and during the season might be too busy to use it.

“I just checked out the website today in the hotel. I have not looked at it since May. I just haven’t had the time, you know?”

“The pro deal swag on the website is pretty cool. Instructors like that. But I can tell you that most of them never look at the websites. They don’t have computers at home. There is one set up with access in the ski school, but most of the time they just use it to check their e-mail.”

¹⁹ This observation isn’t necessarily borne out by other PSIA/AASI research, which points to publications and the websites as valuable assets. However, this observation does point to the difficulty in breaking through communications clutter.



"I use it to see about national academy timing and schedules, and to get phone numbers and e-mails. It's handy and there is good stuff on it, I just don't think to use it that much, and my instructors don't either."

Pro Deals

Respondents commented on the pro deals provided by the association as being an important member benefit and a major motivator for instructors to join.

"It's getting tougher. Pro deals are hard to get now. The manufacturers make it tougher. It's good that PSIA offers this. It is one of the motivators I use to get instructors to join."

"Pro deals and SWAG are a huge motivator. Instructors really, really see the benefit of it."

"The equipment is becoming astronomically costly. It is very rewarding if you can get a deal on the latest equipment. It is kind of like a thank you for teaching."

Marketing Materials

The survey indicates that there is limited awareness of the marketing materials provided by the association. Directors representing small/day resorts appear to be more interested in using materials such as "Go With a Pro" than were directors of large resorts. These respondents said they have limited internal resources to assist them with instructor recruiting²⁰ and marketing of lessons, and that the association has an obligation to help with these activities. However, they had difficulty articulating a collective solution to their problems and tend to want specific solutions for a wide range of area-specific problems. As a result, PSIA/AASI will be challenged to solve a local area's issues and will have a difficult time meeting these expectations.

Large/destination directors appear to have little to no interest in seeing marketing campaigns or material that promotes to consumers, since that competes with efforts already underway by the area. Some directors, primarily from smaller areas, expressed interest in promoting the value of instruction and the value of professional instruction to consumers. No one expressed interest in promoting different levels of certification to consumers.

"We all have time poverty. We don't have time to figure out how to download it and put it on a magnet and get it up on the lift tower, although getting it on the lift tower is the easy part of it. Some of us are technologically challenged. If we can place an order for printed pieces, this would be useful."

"If they had things like that available to buy, I agree, we would buy things to put up around the resort if we could just plug in our logo, whatever logo that is, and order from them. We pay cost or whatever."

"From what I read on the website, the 'Go With a Pro' stuff was designed to increase exposure in your rental shops, with stuff like table tents and stickers. These are very well

²⁰ The 2002 *Secret Shopper* research addressing the process to become an instructor and join PSIA/AASI revealed that each resort has a different process and qualifications for becoming an instructor. This research also pointed to the wide range of requirements, process, and service by PSIA/AASI divisions in responding to inquiries by potential members.



done, by the way: stickers for rental skis, posters for rental shop, cafeteria stuff, other locations. It seems like a good thing and I'd like to use it."

Recommendations: PSIA/AASI should continue to monitor the value to members of the association's communication and marketing elements to increase the relevance of these initiatives.



APPENDIX A

List of Challenges Faced by Ski/Snowboard School Directors

- Recruiting
- Retention
- Quality of part-time instructors
- Skill level. Snowboard role versus the skiing role, for teaching skill <skills?>
- Quantity—Just the volumes themselves of instructors <huh?>
- Aging of ski instructors (more are 55+)
- Customer service training for instructors
- Keeping instructors motivated
- Ability to pay instructors well
- Retention beyond five years
- Cost of certification
- Managing risk
- Training
- Maintaining relationship with other departments at the resort
- Lack of women instructors
- Lack of bilingual instructors
- Balancing supply and demand (i.e., having enough instructors on weekends and holidays)
- Balancing part-time with full-time instructors
- Changing expectations of customers; customers want to learn quicker
- Seeing more small children
- Can't get enough instructors to teach kids
- Burn-out for instructors who teach kids
- Capturing the teen market—getting them to take lessons
- Teaching in park and pipe
- Keeping up the skill level of part-timers
- Retention of guests; getting first-timers to return
- Pressure to keep season pass prices lower; hard to set lesson prices and keep positive ROI

Role and Purpose of the National Teams

(as Outlined in the Team Tryout Information Packet)

The purpose of the PSIA and AASI national demonstration teams is to promote, support, and assist in the development of PSIA and AASI education programs and activities at all levels.

Based on the needs of the association as determined by the national board of directors, core team member responsibilities are as follows:

- Support the educational efforts of PSIA/AASI divisions.
- Support PSIA/AASI marketing and sponsor activities.
- Participate in PSIA/AASI educational development and member communications.
- Participate in national events (e.g., National Academy).
- Support PSIA/AASI industry partners.
- Provide representation at international events as deemed necessary by the board of directors.



APPENDIX B: Discussion Guide

WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS

15 Minutes

My name is Laurie Rider and I want to thank you all for coming. I know several of you have flown in from other places to be here and I appreciate your time and willingness to come to this discussion. This afternoon we're going to talk about what it's like to be the director of a ski/snowboard school, the challenges you face, and how PSIA and AASI might be better able to help you achieve your goals.

I work for a market research company that specializes in finding out what people think about all kinds of things. My job is to go around the country talking to people about all kinds of things: I talk to doctors about medical devices, I talk to teenagers about music, I talk to moms about snacks for their kids, I talk to techies about new software... you name it. My job is to find out what people honestly think about all kinds of things. It is important for you to know that I am not an employee of PSIA or AASI; I am an independent market researcher. My job is getting you to give me your honest opinions about things; I hope you will all help me do that today.

You have all been invited here because PSIA/AASI thinks you might have an opinion or two and they'd like to know what that is. I am going to lead this group through a discussion for the next two hours. I have this guide in front of me that I will be referring to from time to time to remind me of what questions I want to ask you.

For those of you who have never done something like this before, there are people behind this mirror. These are people that I work with and they are interested in what you have to say. Also, we are taping this discussion for the people I work with that weren't able to be here today. Is this ok?

Please know that there are no right or wrong answers, I just want to understand your opinions and what you think. That said, I do want to hear from everyone, so today we have some rules to follow:

Moderator has rules written on easel sheet:

Rules:

- Everybody participates.
- No talking over one another.
- No "interpreting" what others are saying ("I think he means...").
- Be concise, say it and move on.

Also, someone might occasionally come in the room with a note for me. Don't worry about this. All it is, is another question they want me to ask you.

Before we begin, let's go around the room and quickly introduce ourselves. Tell us your name, where you work, and what the biggest change is that you have noticed about the ski industry in the past five years.

SKI & SNOWBOARD SCHOOL CHALLENGES

20 Minutes



What is the biggest challenge your ski/snowboard school is facing this season in relation to *instructors*?

- *Go around the room, each person answers question.*
- *Probe training, recruitment, motivation, retention, compensation, if not brought up.*
- *Moderator records comments on easel.*

What is the biggest challenge your ski/snowboard school is facing with regard to *customers*?

- *Go around the room, each person answers question.*
- *Probe:*
 - *Selling lessons*
 - *Try to get a sense of whether or not they believe part of their job is to market the ski/snowboard school*
 - *Customer service training*
 - *Interdepartmental communication (i.e., ski school w/the rest of the resort).*
- *Moderator records comments on easel.*

Moderator posts easel papers filled with responses around the room.

Now I want you to look at all these things listed up here and choose the one thing that you think is the biggest challenge for you. Take a moment to think about it, and write down on the piece of paper in front of you. This is a no talking exercise. Then we will talk about it.

Moderator asks each participant what they wrote down and places a star next to that comment on the easel sheet. After everyone has said what they chose, moderator leads a discussion about the topics identified, starting with those that were chosen by more than one person.

- *Why did you choose this?*
- *If this doesn't get addressed how would it impact your job?*
- *If it does get addressed, how would it make the resort run better?*

PSIA/AASI PERCEPTIONS

25 Minutes

Now I'd like to talk specifically about PSIA/AASI. I will spend the balance of our time asking you specific questions about PSIA/AASI, and my goal is to hear what everyone has to say. We have a lot to talk about, and many of you will have lots of opinions on the topics we discuss, so I'll ask us all to be respectful of one another, as we might have differing opinions, and that is perfectly ok.

Let's start off by talking about PSIA/AASI in general, from your point of view. Why is it a *good* thing for your ski and snowboard school to be associated with PSIA/AASI?

- *Group shout out.*
- *Moderator lists responses on easel.*

In what ways is it a *bad* thing for your ski and snowboard school to be associated with PSIA/AASI ?

- *Group shout out.*
- *Moderator lists responses on easel.*

Does your ski/snowboard school encourage PSIA/AASI Membership? How?

How often are you in contact with PSIA/AASI?



- *Probe regional office vs. national office.*
- *Probe: How accessible is PSIA/AASI to you?*
- *Probe: If you have a need of PSIA/AASI are you able to contact them and get a response?*

THE ROLE OF PSIA/AASI

30 Minutes

Now I'd like to get a better sense of the role that PSIA/AASI plays in the operation of your ski/snowboard schools. I am going to begin with a "no-talking exercise." I have a sheet of paper to hand out to each of you. What I'd like you to do is to read the instructions and answer the questions. Mark your answers directly on the sheet of paper using the pen provided. Once everyone is done, we will talk about how you answered the questions. I'll give you two to three minutes of quiet to do this exercise. If you have any questions about the instructions, please ask.

Figure 1. Rating Sheet Passed out to Respondents

Instructions: Using a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 = Poor and 5 = Excellent, please rate how well PSIA/AASI helps you do the following things. Please mark an "X" in the appropriate box .

	1 Poor	2 Fair	3 Average	4 Good	5 Excellent
A. Sell more lessons by providing ideas and tools you can use to market your ski/snowboard school to the public.					
B. Recruit and keep quality instructors.					
C. Educate and train your instructors.					

Of the three things listed above (A, B, or C), which do you think is the most important thing PSIA/AASI should be helping you do? Why?

Is everyone finished? Great, now let's talk about how each of you answered the questions. First I'd like to go around the room and have each of you, one at a time, tell me the score you gave each statement, and then tell me which one you chose as most important.

- *Moderator records ratings on an easel.*
- *Once ratings are collected, moderator initiates discussion on each one.*
- *Moderator begins the discussion with the topic that received the overall highest rating and probes as to why it was rated highly. For each topic the following specific questions are asked.*

Recruiting instructors:

- In what ways does your membership and affiliation with PSIA/AASI help you recruit instructors?
- Is it PSIA/AASI's responsibility to help you recruit instructors? Why/why not?
- Are there other things PSIA/AASI should be doing to help you recruit instructors?

Selling lessons:

- In what ways does your membership and affiliation with PSIA/AASI help you market your ski/snowboard school?
- Should this be a focus of PSIA/AASI? Why/why not?
 - *Probe:* Should PSIA/AASI promote:
 - PSIA/AASI certified instructors to the public?
 - PSIA/AASI certified instructors over non-certified instructors
 - higher levels of certification over lower levels?
 - PSIA/AASI certified instructors over foreign instructors
- Are there other things PSIA/AASI should be doing to help you sell lessons?

Training your instructors:

- What are the ways that your membership and affiliation with PSIA/AASI helps you train your ski/snowboard instructors?
 - *Probe: Clinics, exams, materials*
- Should this be a focus of PSIA/AASI? Why?
- Are there other things PSIA/AASI could do better to help you train instructors?

AWARENESS & VALUE PERCEPTION OF PSIA/AASI MATERIALS 30 minutes

Ok. Now I'd like to get a sense of all the things that PSIA/AASI provides for you and what you think of them. Let's start by just creating a list, everything we can think of, of the kinds of materials and programs that PSIA/AASI creates.

- *Shout out exercise.*
- *Moderator builds list on easel.*

After initial list is built, moderator mentions any programs or services that were not listed. As each one is read off, moderator asks for a show of hands to see how many are familiar with that program or service. List includes:

- *The Professional Skier and The Pro Rider magazines*
- *Website*
- *Educational materials (books, online content, video)*
- *Clinics*
- *Marketing/advertising materials (Go with a Pro)*
- *Safety Materials (Lids on Kids, Heads Up, Smart Style)*
- *Catalog and discounts from sponsors*
- *National demo teams*
 - *Probe how to make more useful.*

Is there anything on this list that you think is a waste of time for PSIA/AASI? Something they should not be doing? Why?

What is the most important thing on this list?



Ok, we are almost done, but before you go I'd like to get your reaction to one specific program that PSIA/AASI has designed to help you sell more lessons. I've got some materials to show you, but before I do, I'd like to know how many of you are familiar with it already.

So, with a show of hands, how many of you have heard of "Go with a Pro?"

If there is some recognition, moderator asks those who are familiar with it to explain it to those who are not. If, not moderator explains it as such:

Go With a Pro is a campaign and resource kit offering simple marketing and messaging tools designed to help:

- Ski and snowboard schools attract more guests to lessons at all levels.
- Raise the image and value of ski and snowboard instructors and coaches with consumers, their peers. and within the industry in general.
- Make taking a lesson from a pro at any level more cool than learning from friends.

PSIA/AASI developed a collection of marketing artwork, including signs, table tents, coffee cup wraps, buttons, stickers, logos, etc. that ski resorts can download from the website free of charge and use to create their own marketing materials.

- *Moderator then shows a display board with examples of the artwork mounted on it.*

So, what is your initial reaction to this?

- Is it valuable? Why/why not?
- Would you use it? Why/why not?
- How could you/would you use this?
- How could this be made more useful for you?

CONCLUSION

Moderator thanks participants for their time and shares any necessary logistical announcements (e.g., dinner tonight, tomorrow's activities). After respondents leave, moderator collects each person's pieces of paper.

