



# PSIA/AASI

## MESSAGE TESTING RESEARCH FINAL REPORT

December 30, 2006



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Methodology .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Member Benefits.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Message Strategy.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Creative &amp; Testimonials.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Additional Needs.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Appendix: Discussion Guide.....</b>	<b>12</b>



## INTRODUCTION

PSIA/AASI had been losing membership from ski and snowboard instructors for the past three years. Working with MarketSpark beginning in September 2005, it conducted a series of focus groups with snow sport school directors to better understand perceptions of the organizations, their perceived value, and issues and concerns expressed by these directors.

One of the major issues identified by the research was Membership Recruitment. Snow sport school directors felt that the organizations expected them to recruit new PSIA/AASI members with little or inconsistent assistance given them in communicating the benefits of joining. This led to disparate messages being communicated to new ski and snowboard Instructors and a bit of resentment from school directors at not being better supported in doing this task.

Peak Exposure and MarketSpark worked with Cultivator Advertising to:

- Identify current messages being used to communicate the benefits of joining PSIA/AASI,
- Develop key messages to put in the hands of snow sport schools for new ski and snowboard instructor membership recruitment, and
- Develop a customizable creative campaign, using changeable testimonials from current PSIA/AASI members, to support schools in recruiting new PSIA/AASI members.

Before this campaign is rolled out to snow sport schools nationally, PSIA/AASI wanted to test the concepts, messages and creative with some of the school directors and members of the Ski and Snowboard School Director Committee.

The goal of this project was to understand the best message and creative approach to use in communicating the benefits of joining PSIA/AASI to new instructors, by understanding the opinions of snow sport school directors who would be distributing and talking up the communications materials.

## METHODOLOGY

We held one focus group on November 30, 2006 in Denver, Colorado at a professional focus group facility (TAi Denver) with a combined group of small and large area snow school directors. We augmented this group with one-on-one telephone interviews with four additional snow school directors who could not attend the in-person research group.

Jenni Cooper of Periquin Strategy LLC, a boutique brand strategy and qualitative marketing research firm, led the participants through a series of questions and exercises. They were asked to evaluate the benefits that come with PSIA/AASI membership and encouraged to talk about the value to their schools, the resorts and the members of these benefits. They were presented with three different recruiting messaging strategies and with a possible creative execution and messages that could be used to help in recruiting new PSIA/AASI members. The entire campaign was based upon using real, current members of PSIA/AASI: their pictures, names and testimonials.



## Qualitative Research

Because these discussions were held with a small number of participants, it is important to keep in mind the limitations of this type of qualitative (as opposed to quantitative) marketing research. In qualitative research, the goal is to engage personally and emotionally with participants. It enables more depth and nuance in results and is especially helpful in understanding perceptions and the reasons why behind opinions. It was, therefore, an appropriate methodology to use for this type of advertising research.

Qualitative research, because it involves very small samples, cannot tell us how many people think a certain way. We cannot extrapolate the results to the underlying population; i.e. we cannot say that because two people in the focus group liked blue, therefore 29% of PSIA/AASI members like the color blue. So, although we did some exercises that produced numbers, these numbers cannot be expanded to the whole group of members or even of snow school directors. Instead, we look for patterns of opinion, reasons why participants feel a certain way and new ideas that can be built upon in the future.

The Discussion Guide that was used in both the Focus Group and the Phone Interviews is included in its entirety in the Appendix.

## MEMBER BENEFITS

### Certification

Consistent with the research conducted in 2005 by MarketSpark, the most important benefit of PSIA/AASI membership in the eyes of snow school directors is certification. Certification leads to more professional and more committed instructors. Once a new instructor begins the certification process, and during the time that he or she prepares for Level 1, 2 and/or 3 certification, the professionalism and commitment level grows. This process lies at the heart of the value of PSIA/AASI in the eyes of snow school directors.

*“There’s nothing that keeps them being more professional like certification does. Unless they’re extraordinarily internally motivated.”*

Certification also serves as a valuable tool for directors when hiring experienced instructors and in assigning instructors to lessons. The benchmark that certification gives a director was mentioned to be invaluable. It shows them the pay level, lesson level and internal training level a new instructor should be expected to need or deserve.

*“It gives us (in theory) a baseline or expectation of what a person should be able to do, based on their credential.”*

*“Level two or three means something – I understand their level, pay, what they can do.”*



## Value less pronounced at the low and high ends

A key insight shared by snow schools directors was the way in which PSIA/AASI membership misses in its value for both new and seasoned snow school instructors. Brand new instructors may not yet be interested in becoming certified. They may not have decided whether or not to remain an instructor past the one-year mark. For this reason, PSIA/AASI membership does not currently hold much allure for brand new instructors. Some snow schools require PSIA/AASI membership of every new instructor, and this primes the pump for the instructors, puts them in front of the offerings of PSIA/AASI and often gets them interested in working toward certification.

*“What’s in it for me?..Why do I have to go to PSIA, we have it all in-house...The pin just isn’t hitting it with the youth market.”*

*“PSIA is missing the opportunity to do a lot with brand – pins, patches, stickers, logo related items that are only available through membership.”*

For areas that don't require membership of their new instructors, a “carrot” may be needed to get them to invest in the membership fees. Various ideas were discussed:

- **Swag**, either from PSIA/AASI or from sponsors of the organization. If new members knew that they would get immediate value, especially in the form of merchandise that isn't available to anyone who isn't an instructor, it would start to bring back the **sexy or cool** factor to the organization that many participants fear is missing in the eyes of the young instructor.
- A dotted line from membership to associated discounts that **“pay back”** the membership. In this way, the cost of belonging to PSIA/AASI is connected up with immediate value, in addition to longer-term or higher-level benefits.
- A **Registered Clinic** that covers the history of PSIA/AASI and shows the progression from Level One on, plus the National Teams, only available to new members.
- With all the variety in skiing and riding now, many newer instructors may want to be able to **emphasize specialty skills**, such as park and pipe, in addition to and beyond the Level 1 and 2 certifications.
- **Health care benefits** or other professional benefits offered through PSIA/AASI.

For senior level members, keeping their certification up is not always a given. The value of membership is not necessarily the same as it was when they started. The directors didn't really support a “carrot” approach for this group. Most areas instead use a “stick” approach here, reducing the pay of an instructor who doesn't show a current membership card. With recruiting tough, however, directors sometimes don't want to risk losing a seasoned instructor over this issue.



## Balance must be struck between passion and materialism

At the same time that young instructors may need to understand how they benefit immediately from membership, directors don't want PSIA/AASI to overemphasize selfish motivations. As we see in the next sections, internal energy, passion and a desire to inspire others are the higher level benefits that keep an instructor in the profession over the long run. But in the short run, each instructor runs a cost-benefit equation in his or her head regarding membership in PSIA/AASI. So these two drives must be kept in balance. Basic needs for money and recognition should be offset by appeals to emotional and altruistic desires. In this way, instructors can feel good inside and can point to tangible external benefits as well. Again, this aligns with the findings of the MarketSpark research, which emphasized the need for focusing on motivation beyond pay increases for instructors.

## MESSAGE STRATEGY

Of the three message strategies tested, a pretty clear preference emerged. On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being that it poorly communicated the value of joining PSIA/AASI to a new instructor, and 5 meaning it communicated well, "Ski. Inspire. Teach./Ride. Inspire. Teach." and its associated language was preferred overall.

Be a Pro	Ski. Inspire. Teach. Ride. Inspire. Teach.	Your Sport. Your Passion.
Average = 3.2/5	Average = 4.0/5	Average = 3.1/5

Again, because this was qualitative research, what is most important is the *reason why* participants most preferred the second message and liked the other two less, not the numbers per se.

### Be a Pro

**Positive:** Directors like the idea of a "Pro" and likened it to the esteem in which tennis or golf pros are held. They want serious instructors who are committed to this as a profession.

**Negative:** However, in terms of recruiting new members, this message seemed to lack emotion and to be "stuffy" and "old school", "what PSIA has always been". Some also feared that this message puts too much emphasis on "me", not what I do for guests. Directors also worried that this was off-putting to those instructors who don't join PSIA/AASI and almost implies that they are less than professional. This could be especially offensive to those instructors who are professionals in another field or who have professional qualifications in skiing, riding or another sport.

It is interesting to note too that, although this message is most straightforward in underlining the hard work and professionalism that PSIA membership symbolizes, directors felt that this connection isn't the strongest way to appeal to new instructors. These words could almost be viewed as sounding defensive.



## Your Sport. Your Passion.

**Positive:** A number of directors wondered whether this might be the preferred tagline with younger instructors. They liked the last line of the positioning; “camaraderie” is important and valued. “It appeals to the individualistic values of younger folks.” “Passion” also tested high. In addition, when this tagline was combined with the faces of snow school instructors, participants liked it better than when it was viewed as words alone.

**Negative:** Fewer directors disliked this message, although a number of them found the positioning paragraph “boring”. But while it may appeal to a younger audience, it lacked the core of what keeps instructors coming back season after season.

## Ski. Inspire. Teach. Ride. Inspire. Teach.

**Positive:** Directors really liked this message. Their own words capture it best:

*“Transcending just teaching skills into improving the quality of people’s lives. That’s what a great instructor does.”*

*“Across the board, this is the type of person that you’re looking for. The kind of person that’s passionate. Is inspired, motivated to help others.”*

*“Let’s not overlook that first word, Ski or Ride. I mean that’s what gets a lot of people into it initially. I want to ride, so I want to be an instructor. That’s what started me into it. I wanted to ski, and that’s all I could figure out how to do it.”*

*“You are endorsing their good decision to do something on the moral high ground and the lifestyle high ground. You don’t have to be rich to be successful. You are making a difference in other people’s lives.”*

*“This is the badge that younger instructors need to find value in this profession.”*

**Negative:** There were few if any negatives communicated about this option.



## Additions to the messaging

The messaging as presented was missing a few key ideas in the opinions of directors:

1. **Fun.** While the smiling faces helped soften the message, a number of directors wanted to make sure that the element of fun is presented. It's fun to ski, ride and teach!
2. Joining PSIA/AASI not only makes you a better teacher, it makes you a **better skier or rider.**

*"...what does it do for ME as a person? I see what it does for me as an instructor, but not as a skier or snowboarder. We try to focus 51% of the time on an instructor as a person, then the rest of time on him or her as an instructor.*

*It's about improving – you do it for money and teaching, but also to improve your own abilities as a skier and snowboarder. I want someone to teach me about how to do the latest thing in the park. I want to ski in waist deep powder."*

3. When we're talking about the benefits of belonging to PSIA/AASI we should not lose sight of **how PSIA/AASI contribute** to making these happen.

While a consistent, nationwide standard of certification is important to snow school directors, they almost unanimously felt that this benefit of membership would not be understood or valuable to beginning instructors. Once someone has worked on their certification levels, many do move to other ski resorts around the country, at which point the transferability of the certification becomes quite important. But it's a rare instructor who thinks this far into the future from the very beginning.

## CREATIVE & TESTIMONIALS

Directors really like the whole concept of a campaign centered on real, current members of PSIA/AASI. Showing an attractive photo of a truly passionate instructor who talks about growing in the sport and inspiring others resonates with directors. Some hoped that this type of campaign could begin to **reintroduce the feelings** they had back when they started out as instructors. Many talked about the few instructors or National Team members they idolized as a young instructor, and wondered why this desire to emulate a truly accomplished, senior level instructor doesn't seem to exist in the same way among their staff.

Keys to the creative campaign are:

1. Upbeat, smiling, well-groomed, attractive instructors should be featured.
2. Attention to the details of gear and equipment (even a tan) is important.
3. Some photos showing instructors teaching would be useful.



The concept of the real-life photos was energizing to the directors:

*“I like the first two photos...they’re fun...it tells a story for me.”*

*“I’d like to hire 10 people just like that.”*

*“Makes me want to be there instead of sitting at my desk right now.”*

Directors want to feature pictures that reflect the look they try to maintain among their own staff:

*“I hate the long hair guy. If this guy comes to my line-up, he doesn’t go out that day until he cleans it up.”*

## Testimonials

In terms of testimonials, **emotional appeal, passion and challenge** were the criteria every director used to judge the quotes from real PSIA/AASI members. Directors disliked phrases that were too shallow, stuffy, preachy, traditional or outside the normal experience of instructors.

The two top quotes were:

**“I enjoy the opportunity to give somebody the passion about a sport that I truly love.”**

Mark Styles  
Crystal Mountain, Thompsonville, MI  
Alpine Instructor  
PSIA Member 10 Years

**“PSIA and AASI give us a continuing source of education. And I would encourage others to always challenge themselves to think and grow.”**

Kelley Webster  
Telluride Ski and Snowboard School, Telluride, CO  
Snowboard Instructor  
AASI Member 4 Years

## Posters and postcards most desired

The recommended picture, quote and copy approach would be considered most valuable on **posters** to hang in training rooms and locker rooms, **postcards** that can be sent to directors to be mailed or emailed to their new instructors and **inserts** for training manuals or new hire packets. Many mentioned that these would be most valuable if they drove prospective members to the PSIA/AASI website.



## Even more depth wanted

Ideally, directors would like see the testimonials turned into stories that instructors can relate with and want to emulate. Some examples of ways to do this are:

- In-depth interviews with instructors turned into stories of their history in the sport, key moments in their teaching history and the role of PSIA/AASI. These interviews could be featured text on the website, or even video that could be shown in a training room, featured on the PSIA/AASI website or downloaded to an iPod.
- Revolving quotes that could be pasted each week over the current one on the poster in the locker room.
- A white board with a recruiting message and PSIA/AASI branding to be used by schools to post daily messages to instructors.
- In-person visits by PSIA/AASI members to recruit new instructors.

Also, the website itself was discussed quite a bit. While it is considered valuable as it is for members, new instructors who have not yet joined do not have access to much of the material on the site. A **Prospective Member section** should be added that gives the flavor of the member section, through some materials, information on what it takes to be certified and the story of PSIA/AASI.

*“Make sure we have some good, tangible, meaty information that new instructors can sink their teeth into, and that we don’t go back to being a stuffy, professional organization as we did in the past..”*

*“If you had the comprehensive website we talked about, where you could click into something. Interviews with instructors that have been doing it for 31 years. Here is why I’ve been doing what I’ve been doing. And here is the passion I’ve had over the years. Then it really becomes a story that somebody relates to, not just some words on a poster.”*

*“Once we get the staff, I want to see PSIA do more to recruit the membership. I’d even pay for the party if they would come and talk to my crew about the benefits.”*



## ADDITIONAL NEEDS

Many directors were concerned that they were just guessing about what would appeal to actual new instructors in encouraging them to join PSIA/AASI. They would really like to hear from current first and second year instructors, both those who have joined PSIA/AASI and those who haven't. Why have they joined? Why have they not? Do they consider the organizations valuable? Cool? What do they think about the National Teams? What benefits would they like to see offered? This might be a next step for the organization, either before or after these materials are rolled out.

If done before, it would provide an additional screen on the viability of the campaign. If done after the materials are in use for a season, the input could serve as a test of the approach and a way to generate more ideas to evolve it into the future.

In order to continually freshen our understanding of the motivations and experiences of instructors, it would be valuable to develop a way to track new and ongoing instructors so that we can continue to work on ways to make PSIA/AASI valuable and relevant. We would want to make sure to include the opinions of members and non-members and the experiences of those at large, mid-sized and small resorts. One method would be to track a panel of instructors over time, adding new instructors each year, and to ask participants to report both their own and their colleagues' experiences.



## APPENDIX



# Discussion Guide

## PSIA/AASI Message Testing Study

### INTRO: GET TO KNOW YOU

5 min

*We'll start with some 'ground rules' and warm-up conversation. Note: At any time during these groups, if there is a question or clarification anyone in the back room needs, please have one of you or someone from the focus group facility send a note to me in the discussion room.*

*Throughout, additional prompts will be used: "Tell me more.." "Do you agree with XX?" "Why?"*

1. Ground rules
  - Thank everyone for coming today
  - Introduce myself – I'm independent
  - We're filming this group, my colleagues are behind the glass
  - I want to know what each of you think, please be as honest as possible
2. Goal of today's group
  - PSIA and AASI have taken the feedback received last year
  - Materials are being developed to aid in PSIA/AASI membership recruiting
  - As those who would be using these materials, we want to get your input and feedback on the strategy, message and creative
3. Now let's go around the room. I'd like each of you to introduce yourself, tell us what resort you're from and whether you participated in last year's focus groups. If you did participate, what is the main takeaway you had from those groups?



## MEMBER BENEFITS

25 minutes

Last year's research uncovered many positive attributes about PSIA/AASI, as well as some areas that need attention. At the same time that the PSIA/AASI organization is focusing on addressing some of the issues that arose last year, it is also working on better communicating the main value to Snow Sport Instructors of belonging to PSIA/AASI. I'll be putting some specific language and materials in front of you later in the group.

First, I'd like to discuss the specific Member Benefits that come with PSIA/AASI membership. I'd like to get your feedback on the value and importance of these various benefits from your perspective. I'm going to hand out to each of you a list of these benefits. I'd like you to read through these benefits and the description of each one.

I want to understand how the specific benefits given Member Instructors translate into making them better instructors from your perspective.

4. Which of these benefits create more professional instructors?
  - How?
5. Which of these benefits lead to instructors with better skills?
  - In what way?
6. Which ones result in more committed instructors?
  - Why?
7. Are there benefits that you think are unnecessary or unhelpful?
8. Are there any benefits you'd add if you could?
9. What is the value to YOU and your Snow Sport School of having PSIA/AASI certified instructors?



## MESSAGE STRATEGY

20 minutes

I'm going to pass around to each of you a packet with three Value Proposition Statements. The Value Proposition Statements are ways to communicate the primary value of belonging to PSIA/AASI in recruiting new Snow Sport Instructors and retaining current PSIA/AASI members. I'd like to get your opinions on each of these statements. First, I'll have you go through the materials on your own, without discussing your opinions with the others in the group. Then we'll discuss your thoughts as a group. I'm going to give you 7 minutes to go through the statements. I'd like you to circle any words you particularly like and to put an X through any words that are wrong in your opinion. Next, I'll have you circle the number at the bottom that rates this statement in your opinion. "One" means you think it is poor at communicating the value of belonging to PSIA/AASI to new potential members, and "five" means it is great at communicating this.

GIVE EVERYONE 7 MINUTES.

Let's go around the table and I'll record your Rating for each statement. (RECORD THE RATINGS ON A FLIP CHART).

Now I'd like to discuss each statement (GO THROUGH THESE QUESTIONS FOR EACH STATEMENT):

10. What did you like about this statement?
11. What did you dislike?
12. Does this statement communicate a clear value in belonging to PSIA/AASI?
  - Is this the right value?
13. Is this statement believable?
14. Does this statement communicate value to:
  - A new Snow Sport Instructor?
  - A current PSIA/AASI member?
  - A Snow Sport School Director?
  - The resort?
15. Does this statement speak to Snow Sport Instructors of different ages? Young? Older?
16. AFTER DISCUSSING EACH OF THE THREE STATEMENTS: Is there important value that isn't communicated by any of these statements?
17. A consistent, nationwide standard of training and certification was an important benefit of PSIA/AASI membership as discussed in the groups last year. Should this value be communicated directly in the recruiting campaign?

Let's take a quick 5 minute break. If you need to use the restroom, now is a good time. You can also help yourself to a soft drink or some M&Ms.

*I'll spend this time in the back room, so it will be a good time to cover anything we've missed.*



## HEADLINES & CREATIVE

25 minutes

Now, I'm going to show you some artwork, or creative, that PSIA/AASI proposes for printed materials to be used in helping to recruit new members. I'd like to get your feedback on it. The approach used for this creative is centered on photos of and testimonials from real, current members of PSIA and AASI. This campaign can grow and change every season with new participants being featured from around the country. I'll show you samples of a poster, a postcard, a tri-fold brochure and a banner. Your division can modify these to meet various needs.

18. What do you think?
19. Do you like it? Why?
20. How does this make you feel?
21. What do you think about using real instructors to recruit new members?
22. Would this be successful in encouraging new Snow Sport Instructors to join PSIA/AASI? Why?
23. Where should this material be used?
  - PROMPT IF NECESSARY: Brochures? Website? Video to show new members? Buttons? Posters? Mailings? Other?

Next I'm going to go through some specific phrases, or Headlines, that could be used in printed materials to new Snow Sport Instructors to encourage them to join PSIA/AASI. I'd like to get your feedback as a group. I'm going to hold up a board with words on it. We'll go through a number of these. These are actual quotes from real Instructors.

As I go through each headline, I'd like you to rank each one on the page provided to you, on a scale of 1-5.

(SHOW EACH HEADLINE AND ASK THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ABOUT EACH ONE):

24. What do you think of this one?
25. Do you like it? Why?
26. How does this make you feel?
27. What is PSIA/AASI trying to communicate?
28. Is it believable? Why?
29. Would this be successful in encouraging new Snow Sport Instructors to join PSIA/AASI? Why?
30. Would these materials and headlines recruit members who reflect how your area is addressing current trends? (Such as...)
  - More snowboarding instruction needed
  - More focus on freeriding and park & pipe instruction
  - More demand for children's instruction
  - Your Snow Sport School is relied upon as a profit center by your resort
  - Ongoing challenges in recruiting and retaining Snow Sport Instructors
31. Are there other topics that you'd like to see represented in these types of quotes?

COLLECT SHEETS AND RECORD RATINGS, THEN DISCUSS WHICH ONES WORK OR DON'T.



## USEFULNESS TO DIRECTORS

15 minutes

32. Would these materials be helpful to you when communicating about PSIA/AASI to new instructors?
33. What else do you wish would be done to assist Snow Sport School Directors in communicating the values of PSIA/AASI membership?
34. Would these messages be effective in recruiting new members to PSIA/AASI?
35. Would you use these materials?

Thank you for coming today. We really appreciate your opinions and feedback.