



# United States Soaring Team Task Force

Ken Sorenson, Doug Jacobs, Tim Welles, Jim Payne, Jim Short & John Seaborn

## Topic – 8 Communications

Jim Payne –11/03/02 Ver. 3.0 File: TTF 8 Communication 110302

This document is for discussion purposes only and should not be considered the policy of U.S. Soaring Teams. Instead, this document provides a starting place from which to develop more accountable, transparent, competitive and sustainable United States Soaring Teams. You can help shape the future of U.S. Soaring Teams by making your comments regarding this document to John Seaborn ([planned@boulder.net](mailto:planned@boulder.net)) or Jim Payne ([jpaviation@aol.com](mailto:jpaviation@aol.com))

All taskforce documents are posted on the taskforce web page  
[http://www.ssa.org/UsTeam/ust\\_taskforce.htm](http://www.ssa.org/UsTeam/ust_taskforce.htm)

### U.S. Soaring Team Communications

#### Purpose & Goal

The purpose of team communication is to provide team contributors, supporters and the soaring community with current and timely information and news on U.S. Soaring Teams.

#### Philosophy & Discussion

Historically world soaring teams have been a black hole with regards to communication. The soaring community generally made up of non competitors with only a passing interest in team activities often had no real understanding of the team. Not much was known about the team, the championships or the underlying organization. Competitive results were often delayed for days or weeks. This “distance” often resulted in a disconnect between U.S. Teams and their supporters, contributors and soaring community.

With the development of the information age people have come to expect nearly instant access to nearly real time information on whatever topic they seek. The Internet has only spurred this instant information mind set. For better or worse organizations that cannot provide timely and concise information are viewed as backward or outmoded by their constituency.

The internet age has provided great opportunity for U.S. soaring teams in the area of communication. The World Wide Web and e-mail based newsletters allow the team to reach large numbers of people at little cost. The SSA US Team web site provides a wealth of information on U.S. soaring teams and has become an important link between the team and the soaring community.

Team communication must point in two directions, first towards the soaring community, team contributors and supporters. A constant effort needs to be made to educate the soaring community on how the team works and its importance to soaring in the USA.

Of course timely reporting on the competitive aspect of world championships including the daily results, day reports and “you are here” online coverage are critical to the team’s communication program.

There is another and perhaps more important type of communication that is needed as well. Opportunities for person-to-person communication must be developed that allow team members to better connect with the grass roots of the sport. Club gatherings, team sponsored educational events, lectures and articles in Soaring magazine are all aspects of team communication that are critical to long term team success.

The prestige of international competition can be used to promote the sport to the general public and is critical to providing contributors with additional return of their contribution. The team should be in a position to use this newsworthy aspect to promote the sport generally. This is best done through an online team press room and the development of a media data base.

## Why Communication is Important

Establishing solid methods of communication with contributors, supporters and the soaring community allows the U.S. soaring teams to:

- Educate the community to how the team functions, is funded and in other critical aspects of team activities which builds interest in teams
- Build organizational credibility critical to a contribution based organization
- Meets the team’s organizational goals of Transparency, Accountability, Competitiveness and Sustainability
- Provide an avenue for individuals in the soaring community to become supporters financially or otherwise
- Provides a factual counter to the rumor mill conspiracy theories that sometimes take root
- Give people in the soaring community something to cheer for and identify with
- Communication is at the very heart of any team strategy to broaden the importance on the team in U.S. Soaring through education and increase return on contributions.
- Promotion of the sport generally provides additional return on contributions

## What the SSA Membership Thinks

In the recent team e-survey in which 227 SSA members participated a full 90% (205) of participants felt that teams should make communication a priority or a high priority.

There is a role for online contest coverage as provided by U.S. Team in South Africa with 81% (185) of participants indicating that they followed these reports. There is also a strong correlation between contest level and interest in following WSC’s on the web with less experienced participants having less interest in the coverage although a full 67% of the DNC participants followed the championships on the web.

There was relative interest in receiving team bulletins 63% (144) of participants indicating an interest in this form of communication. Participants warmed to the idea of having a team newsletter e-mailed and contest coverage with 77% (174) indicating that they would be interested.

The traditional WSC article in Soaring retains its vital importance in team communication with 83% (189) of participants reading this coverage. The SSA US Team web site is the preferred way to receive information on the US team 52% (117) with e-mail a distant second 24% (55) and the article in soaring in third 19% (43)

## Recommendations

1. The US Team Web site is a critical communication link that should be maintained and enhanced. Near real time world team coverage is very popular with the membership.
2. Every US Team will have a communications person responsible for filing the day reports back to the SSA U.S. Team web master for posting. Future SSA web configurations should allow for direct server update from the team web master.
3. The U.S. Team e-news bulletins, which are available now, should be better marketed to increase the subscriber base. This service should be plugged in soaring magazine, on the U.S. team web, by the SSA and in all team fundraising and promotional activities.
4. The world championship coverage in Soaring Magazine is widely read and is very important. This should be expanded to a similar format as past efforts of the 70's. The *Soaring* article should focus on analysis and what was learned. The "newsy" human interest reports by John Good and Charlie liven up the routine daily reports—the story behind the story.
5. The team will take advantage of club meetings and other gatherings of soaring pilots to present information on the history, background and future on U.S. Teams. Selection to the team carries an obligation to do a reasonable amount of communicating on the team's behalf. Convention speaking, article writing, club presentations, club X-C clinics, contest presentations (coupled with fundraising) are some examples.
6. Opportunities for person-to-person communication will be developed that allow team members to better connect with the grass roots of the sport. Club gatherings, team sponsored educational events, lectures and articles in Soaring magazine are all aspects of team communication that are critical to long term team success.
7. Each of the SSA conventions should feature U.S. Soaring teams in both the fundraising role and the performance cross-country education role.
8. The U.S. Team should develop an online Press Room. This web page would be a one stop resource for developing coverage on soaring and the team for media editors and reporters. A portion of the team communications effort should be to target the general public in an effort to expand the awareness of soaring and competitive soaring using the public relations value of the highly competitive and prestigious world championships.
9. There should be a person within the team organization responsible for team communications both to the membership and the general media.

10. Short “profiles” of the team members should be written periodically in SOARING magazine to help personalize the team and to inspire up and coming competition pilots. Any “payback” efforts, such as Karl’s Mifflin competition training camps, could be highlighted.