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Dear CDU members

First, let me give my apologies for not coming to this important meeting . I was particularly looking forward to meeting the reps from Corel. However I have organized a photographic excursion which became a bit tricky to get off the ground [it is a five-person exercise] and it has turned out to be taking on 20 October. So I shall be returning from Mt Cobbler to Bright as you gather for this meeting. But since the last CDU meeting I have been giving thought to the problems outlined in the presentations given then. I have a strategy to propose. I'd like to be there to discuss it, but this document will have to do.

I will begin by sketching how I became involved in the group. As a former WordPerfect user, I received an e-mail from Corel which informed me about the launch of Paint shop Pro 10 (but which turned into PSP 11 by the time the launch took place). I went along, bought a cheap copy of PSP 9 to try it, and duly upgraded to the latest version. I also bought a copy of Painter. I looked to the group for supporting learning these programs. There was actually little of this, as most of the active members of the group are Corel Draw users, but I found the grid friendly and the presentations interesting, so I have continued to come - especially now that I have retired from work. In my first year or so of membership, pressure of work often prevented me from attending. Had I remained in work, this pressure might well have seen me drifting away from the group.

To judge from the membership chart shown at the last meeting, this may be a fairly typical experience for many joiners. It suggests that there is not enough to hold them after their initial interest.

I have also joined the Melbourne Camera Club, which has a larger membership but seems to face some similar problems. Of the two groups I have been attending, the most successful is the Portrait Group, which is activity-based. The Digital Photography group (comprised, to my disappointment, of Photoshop and GIMP users, with no PSP users other than me) is based on presentations by one or two people, and attendance is much more irregular. It is notable that the average age of the membership of all these groups is over 50. There are very few members under 40 years.

More broadly, the American sociologist Herbert Gans has documented the decline of civic groupings in the United States. The same thing appears to be happening in Australia. Increasingly, younger people do not join hobby-based groups. They network in less-structured ways. I suggest that if the CDU group has a future, it lies in providing an attractive service to younger purchasers of a wider range of Corel products. One way of doing this would be to shift the emphasis online – to deliver the magazine by e-mail, and to structure our meetings around delivering learning materials and services to members via the website. This might involve forming sub-groups to ensure regular development of content across a wider range of products, reflecting the sales of Corel products in the wider community, and seeking the active support of the Corel Corporation in doing this.

Of course I am particularly interested in seeing a sub-group developed to bringing PSP users together. There should be other subgroups we could form as well. I suggest that to form a group, the requirement should be a minimal commitment of:

- (a) Initially creating a suitable sub-section of a CDU website for users of this particular product; and
- (b) updating it with new content at least three or four times a year.

If our meetings were structured around doing this (perhaps with presentations sounding out ideas with a small audience before launching them on unsuspecting Viewers), this could give a more structured framework for our meetings. Hopefully, this would not be at the expense of the friendly atmosphere the group has developed, and it would enhance the sharing of skills and information within it.

In my last presentation to the group, I mentioned that quite a number of world's-best business practices originated in the criminal world, particularly the illegal drug trade. If we follow the path I am suggesting here, I suggest that in re-designing our website we could adapt the basic business model pioneered by the (legal) pornography industry. This model is to provide free "tasters" to attract casual viewers, but to require them to become full, paying members if they want the real hard-core stuff on a regular basis. For irregular users, once-off sales are also possible. Membership (and sources of revenue) would then cease to be limited to the small group of people who can attend face-to-face meetings. Indeed, if this turned out to be a huge success, membership would not be limited to Victoria or Australia.

If this model were to work successfully for us, it would require tapping into the skills of the core group (those who attend meetings regularly) and if possible a wider membership. I think these skills are considerable. However we would need to give folds to matching them to the market. Too many companies have projects have failed commercially because they have been supply-side driven, purchasing models of engineering and programming which were of little use to consumers.

This would certainly work best with the active support of Corel Corporation, including the various styles and promotion devices that we have already talked about. But Corel could also have give us information about the best-selling Corel products, for which there is a potential market. I think it would be in the interests of Corel Corporation to support this exercise because the development of a strong user-based support group would significantly enhance their products.

To return to my particular interest, Corel seem to be promoting sales of PSPP X2 quite successfully as an "prosumer" alternative to Photoshop. There are a huge number of good websites about Photoshop out there. But my attempts to find a good support website for PSPP X2 has come up with very little. There may be a gap in the electronic marketplace here. However before making up their mind on this, we should also seek to find out what we can about the reasons for the recent collapse of the printed *Paint Shop Pro Photo* official magazine.

We would need to give careful consideration to the resources required to do this. These were primarily be a matter of labour rather than of capital. But we need to realistically estimate what is involved, and decide if we wish to make that commitment.

The following table sets out a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis which might be helpful in discussing the strategy I've sketched out above:

Strengths <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Skills of members• Product base in community• Relationship with Corel Corporation	Weaknesses <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Small membership• Insufficient interest in face-to-face meetings• Cost of face-to-face meetings
Opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of user-based support groups for Corel products• Tap into user-base of networkers rather than users• Greater activity-focused meetings• Relocate meetings to lower-cost venue• Gain additional revenue from website users (casual As well as members)	Threats <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Declining membership and revenue under current model• Members may not have the time to sustain a web-based model• Revamped website may not be interesting to product user's community

Cheers

Kelvin