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The New Skill Set for Association Communications Professionals

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Summary: Associations are seeking communications professionals with a new and very diverse skill set to handle all the different job roles. Here are five you may want to acquire, if you haven't already done so.

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Publications. Member communications. PR. Advocacy. Speech writing. Social media. Website content development. Promotional materials for conferences.

Depending on the type and size of association you work for, some (or all!) of those categories—and even more—may fall under your purview.

Following is the dream quintet of skills that many employers are seeking in association communications professionals today.

Writing. This remains paramount among the skills sought in communications professionals and is, sadly, harder and harder to find in candidates. Many employers cite typos and basic grammatical errors in materials. As one executive director said, "I have abandoned my original notion of identifying someone with a unique voice and, at this point, I would be thrilled with clear, error-free writing."

Visual acuity. This does not mean design. It means recognizing good design or having an eye for the visual. As imagery increasingly takes its place next to, or instead of, copy for conveying concepts, products, and services, a talent for scale, color, and imagery, as well as identifying excellent stock visuals, has become increasingly critical.

Technological comfort. While technology has become easier to work with, it still presents a challenge for many, particularly those who have not been raised with it. The ability to work with the multitude of tools available to create and send member e-newsletters, to resize images and logos for multiple social media channels, to use infographics services, to create PDFs, and to perform content management on sites and blogs is essential.

Math. Gulp. Takes you right back to asking your high school math teacher, "What am I ever going to need algebra for? I am going to be an English major!" Determining ROI, calculating media impressions, running metrics reports, and interpreting data are all skills that we are seeking among a candidate pool where, traditionally, right brain and left brain have rarely coexisted. Technology has bred ease of execution, but it has also bred the ability to measure *everything*.

Sales. Another "gulp" for many. But, keeping in mind that one of the goals of communications is to *persuade or influence*, it makes perfect sense. It could mean writing appealing prospective member letters, convincing a member to attend your conference, enticing a volunteer to write an article, and effectively pitching a story to a reporter. Or it could mean simply selling your boss on the idea that you need some additional support in the department.

Between the growing ease of technology, the new prominence of the visual, and the tried-and-true necessity for great writing skills, associations are seeking—and finding—candidates with a diverse skill set. How many do you possess?

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Roxann Henze, January 07, 2015
Good thoughts and ideas!
Roxann



Suzanne Price, January 07, 2015
Excellent points, thank you