

# HELP WANTED: FIND YOUR NEXT MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS STAR



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Associations wants to hire people who have the savvy and skills to thrive in today's evolving marcomm environment. Here's how to find your next superstar.

I'm sure you can relate to this scenario: It's Friday afternoon, and it has been a relatively calm week. No fires to put out—and you actually made some progress on one of your long-term projects. Then, at 4:15, someone on your team pops her head into your office and says, “Hi. Is now a good time to talk?”

You've seen that look before. She is giving you her notice. This isn't about how to persuade her to stay: let's assume that ship has passed. This is about what to do next.

*Instead of having the kneejerk reaction to fill someone's shoes as quickly as possible, it's wise to step back and percolate.*

A team member departing, while disruptive, can also provide a valuable opportunity to revise the position and even the department. And in today's evolving communications and marketing environment, it's important to find someone who has the right skills to take your associations to the next level. So, instead of having the kneejerk reaction to fill someone's shoes as quickly as possible, it's wise to step back and percolate before proceeding. Here's how you can do that:

**Evaluate your department.** What are its strengths and weaknesses? Which new skills would it benefit from? I think the following five skills have become increasingly essential in association marketing and communications positions:

- **Writing:** Excellent writing skill remains paramount among the qualities sought in communications professionals and is, unfortunately, increasingly difficult to locate in candidates. Don't be afraid to ask for writing samples from candidates of any level.
- **Math:** Determining ROI, calculating media impressions, running metrics reports, and interpreting data are all skills that we are seeking among a candidate pool that is frequently more comfortable with words than numbers. Our new team members need to be comfortable with words *and*
- **Design:** While they don't need to be designers, we need our candidates to recognize how design integrates with copy. A talent for scale, color, and imagery —as well as identifying excellent stock visuals—has become increasingly critical.
- **Technology:** As technology becomes easier to work with, our expectations have increased.

Dexterity with the multitude of tools and services available to create and send member e-newsletters, to resize images and logos for numerous social media channels, to use infographics services, to design and send surveys, to create and edit PDFs, and to perform content management on sites and blogs is essential.

- **Sales:** While the word “sales” makes some cringe, it is important to realize that all aspects of marketing and communications require the ability to influence and persuade. In other words, to sell. It could mean writing appealing member recruitment letters, persuading a member to attend your conference, enticing a volunteer to write an article, pitching a story to a reporter—or it could mean motivating other team members to perform to their best ability.

Following the evaluation, **ask yourself if you need to hire a replacement** or if the team can be recalibrated. Oftentimes, team members have talents we are unaware of, and those skills can be nourished with the proper training and management.

If you decide you do want to hire a replacement, **write a long-form job description.** However, be sure to only use it internally. A long-form job description is a great tool for a best-practices manual but is about as unsexy as it gets when it comes to recruitment advertising. There’s a war for talent going on, and the goal is to attract quality candidates—not bore them with the nuts and bolts of the job.

Instead, when you’re ready to begin the recruiting process, **create a brief, visually appealing “position description.”** Candidates like to know that they will be performing meaningful work. Craft a description that explains what the organization accomplishes and how the position helps achieve its overall mission.

Additionally, focus on the positive aspects of the association and the benefits of working there. The more ambitious position descriptions can be in infographic format or even video format, starring the team lead and team members.

**Determine your recruitment channels,** but always start internally since you will cut down on the number of resumes you receive and are more easily able to identify high-caliber candidates. Remember, the most compelling candidates are frequently referred from current staff. Additionally, with the endorsement of a colleague, the ideal candidate is more likely to accept an offer.

Finally, **manage your expectations.** No one candidate will ever be perfect, so don’t focus on what someone “isn’t.” Instead, prioritize the skills and qualities you are seeking. After all, finding a Mandarin speaking, social-media -savvy, AMS expert—who can also work in Photoshop—may always be a stretch! That being

said, how do you go about recruiting marketing and communications professionals in your organizations?

*Whether you're thinking about hiring, are actively recruiting for a new position, or just hired a new team member, I hope you'll consider joining me, Addy Kujawa of the American Association of Orthopaedic Executives, Bill Cramer of the International Bridge, Tunnel and Turnpike Association, and Amy Goldenberg of the American Anthropological Association, when we present our session, "The Evolving Role of Communications in Associations" at ASAE's 2015 Marketing, Membership, and Communications Conference, June 1-2, in Washington, DC.*