

# THOSE VOICES

{ INSIDE YOUR HEAD }  
{ AND OUTSIDE }

**mm&c** 2015<sup>™</sup>  
conference  
marketing, membership & communications

**JUNE 1-2 • WASHINGTON, DC**  
WALTER E. WASHINGTON CONVENTION CENTER

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARIES  
OF SELECTED SESSIONS**

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## Content Marketing Makeover

- Speaker: **Ann Handley**, Author and Chief Content Officer, *MarketingProfs*; @annhandley

### Overview

We live in a very noisy world where everyone is exposed to an avalanche of information each day. For associations, the key to breaking through the clutter is producing *better* content. This is content that engages and inspires people through stories, and that is ridiculously useful.

Creating such content is possible. It starts with having a clear, intentional content strategy. It means producing content that is solely audience-focused. It requires telling great stories, with great writing, through a unique voice.

When done right, great content can create and strengthen relationships, increase engagement, build a brand, and serve as a rallying cry that brings people together.

### Context

Ann Handley explained what content marketing is, described why it matters to associations, and shared best practices from other industries.

### Key Takeaways

- We live in a very noisy world.**

Here is the reality of the world in which associations exist: each day there are 4.75 billion pieces of content shared. There are 1.8 billion photos uploaded, 500 million tweets, and 700 million snapchats. It is in this context in which associations are attempting to break through the clutter, get noticed, engage with members, and build relationships. It is a crowded, noisy landscape, which is only getting noisier.

- Nonprofits increasingly see content marketing as a key part of their overall marketing strategy.**

The Content Marketing Institute (CMI) defines content marketing as “creating and distributing relevant and valuable content to attract, acquire, and engage a specific audience—with the objective of driving profitable customer action.” Key elements of content marketing include:

- *The developer of the content owns the media channel.*
- *Great content is not about the organization that creates it; it is audience-centric.*
- *Content is not advertising; it can complement advertising, but it is inherently not advertising.*
- *Content helps; it doesn't sell.*

Nonprofits are increasingly seeing the value in content. 2015 research conducted by MarketingProfs and CMI found that:

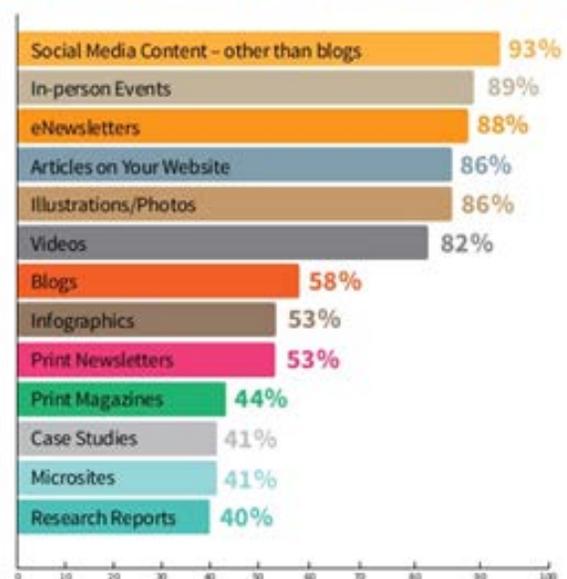
- 61% of nonprofits are using content marketing.
- 69% are creating more content than a year ago.
- 37% plan to spend more on content in the next year.

The top challenges nonprofits face related to content are lack of budget, measuring content effectiveness (only 35% know if their content is effective), and difficulty producing engaging content, which has been a top issue each time it has been measured over the past five years.

- The key to content marketing success is better content, not more content.**

As nonprofits have woken up to the importance of content, organizations have opened the spigots to produce more and more content. This includes social media content, eNewsletters, web articles, videos, blogs, case studies, eNewsletters, web articles, videos, blogs, case studies, infographics, and more.

### Nonprofit Content Marketing Tactic Usage



But simply producing more content of all different types does not equate with good, effective content that gets a specific audience to take a specific action. This requires better content, not more.

“Produce better content, not more content.”  
— Ann Handley

Guideposts for producing better content are:

- *Focus on empathy and experiences (instead of more articles and blog posts).*
- *Focus on relevant and inspired stories.*
- *Focus on useful.*

A formula for creating great content is:

### Great Content = Useful x Empathy x Inspired

- **By adopting these five best practices, associations can consistently create great content.**

The most effective producers of great content share many common characteristics. They:

—*Have a documented content strategy.* Great content doesn't come about randomly. Organizations determine the bigger story that they want to tell and they set a plan. They determine why they are creating a piece of content—what are the objective and the desired action to drive? Who are they trying to reach? What value are they delivering? When to use this content and how? How to measure success? Where will the content be delivered, through what platform? Great content is highly strategic and planned. It is intentional.

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*"Great content feels less like marketing and more like a rallying cry."*

— Ann Handley

—*Are relentlessly audience-focused.* Great content producers know exactly who their audience is and what they want their audience to do, and they follow the rule of FIWTSBS: Find interesting ways to say boring stuff. They are fun, empathetic, and focused on building an audience (analogous to a long-term subscriber base), rather than generating short-term leads.

—*Are irresistibly useful.* Great content producers provide information that the target audience strongly needs (such as a university providing answers about the college application process to highly anxious students), or engaging, interactive, useful tools.

—*Use social media for storytelling, not just sharing.* Great content producers don't just distribute things frequently via social media; they see social media as a vehicle to tell relevant, impactful stories. They develop expectations among their subscribers and establish an editorial calendar.

—*Create a unique voice, with strong writing.* Good writing is about persuasively telling a compelling story; it is not about grammar and proofing (though good grammar and proofing are helpful). And just as important as good writing is the content's tone. The tone should reflect your organization's unique personality. Stay away from trying to be "friendly" or "honest" or "cutting edge." These attributes are mundane. Strive to create a truly unique, differentiated tone that attracts the like-minded, while filtering and repelling those who aren't truly the target audience.

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*"Tell stories well. Words are your ambassadors; don't squander them."*

— Ann Handley

### Can koozies: A love story

Can koozies are drink insulators that keep bottled beverages colder longer. Ann's brother, who is a beer connoisseur, did extensive online research to find the best can koozie. They all sounded alike, until he came across a product from [Freaker USA](#) that told a story about "infusing life, style, and functionality into a drink insulator." A representative from Freaker said, "Your story is the start of the thing that sets you apart." Freaker's content marketing is what sets it apart.

### Other Important Points

- **Conference statistics.** 1,000 attendees, including more than 300 first-timers, with 60 exhibitors in the sold-out exhibit hall. Attendees came from 40 states and D.C.
- **Contact the speaker.** Follow on Twitter [@annhandley](#) and read her best seller [Everybody Writes](#).
- **Connecting on social media.** Follow [#MMCCON](#) on Twitter, and share photos and comments on ASAE's [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) pages.
- **Twitter highlights.** Among the posts on Twitter following Ann's presentation were: "Very inspired by the content marketing sessions," and a [blog post](#) recapping some of Handley's key points.

## A Poetic Voice on D.I.Y. Innovation

- Speaker: **Sekou Andrews**, Poetic Voice

### Overview

The word “association” doesn’t begin to do justice to all that associations are. It falls far short of invoking the unbounded spirit of generous service that gives association work meaning and inspires association professionals to take members to the next level in their professional lives. And the word certainly is inadequate to convey how association work fills its agents with purpose and the deep rewards of a life well lived.

### Context

“You call yourselves ‘associations?’ Please.” With that refrain echoed throughout his presentation, Sekou Andrews delivered a rousing tribute to associations that reminded ASAE members who they are, what they do, and particularly why they do it. His evocative, theatrical, rap-like speaking style—half poetry, half business wisdom—touched levels deeper than intellect.

### Key Takeaways

- **Associations are infinitely more than that word conveys.**

Anybody can “associate.” What are better terms to describe what ASAE members are to the myriad people whose lives they touch? Andrews offered many:

- *Community web-spinners*, who “fasten silos of people to their collective passions” and are the “wi-fi signal connecting industries to networks of like minds that always have four bars.”
- *Disruption climatologists*, conquering the impacts of disruption as technologies and consumer behaviors change like the weather. “Accept that you’ve entered a world of switch, turn, shift, change. You can’t stop and think. It will already be too late.” Mastering the forces of disruption involves recognizing that old matrixes no longer work, learning to speak “Digital Native,” and understanding the mentality of tech-savvy young people—the new ways they operate, think, shop, and live.

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*“You call yourselves ‘associations?’ Please. Anybody can associate. That barely scratches the surface of your purpose.”*

— Sekou Andrews

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*“Your job has changed from sole provider to caterer, so scratch ‘no substitutions’ off your menu.”*

— Sekou Andrews

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- *Self-disruptors*, who “claim disruption in your very name.” This means embracing today’s rapid pace of change, opening your eyes to the patterns in disruption, and joining the ranks of disruptive innovators. Disruption feels unsettling, but the key is to face the discomfort and be open to new ideas so that you can “listen to your future” along with members.

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*“Expect not to expect what you expect to come next.”*

— Sekou Andrews

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- *Multi-channel translators*, “remapping the topography of a digital media literacy to create a new mother tongue of marketing linguistics. You all speak podcasts, pop-up ads, and page views like Portuguese; click-throughs, cookies, and conversion rates like Cantonese.” The new mother tongue being created: “Membermarketarian.” Every “digital dialect” of members is represented.
- *Acronym aficionados*. “If you had your way, you’d make acronyms from random sounds: The American Association for the Advancement of Associations for Associative Aides Assisting in the Associative Arts, AAAAAAAAAA.”
- *Marketing marriage counselors*, who listen to their members more than their spouses do, know their members better than their therapists do, and make members more flexible than their yoga trainers do.
- *Creators of engagement*. People do business with people with whom they have relationships; “if relationships are the goal, engagement is the gold” and associations the alchemists. Past measures of engagement are outdated in today’s era of social media and mobile computing, however. “Let go of the old metrics,” urged Andrews. Engagement isn’t as easily evidenced as a ring on a finger. “Thumbs are the new ring finger.” When members put associations’ words up on walls, link them in blogs, and post them in feeds, that’s engagement. The new rules of engagement require relinquishing control. “If you love something, let it go. If it ‘Likes’ you, it will return and bring with it a return on your marketing investment.”

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*“Thumbs are the new ring finger.”*

— Sekou Andrews

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## Sekou Andrews on How We Make Our Mark

*"You all are not associations. You are humans with adjoining desks and tangential flesh and common breath and inevitable death, trying to find your harmony in someone's song before your final rest, to solve this puzzle of a life well lived, and then share it with a guest.*

*"And it's in the sharing of our work, in the telling of our stories, in the passing of our worth to others—that is where we find our greatest value. It is in open hand, extended: 'Here you go.' Open hand, extended: 'Let me help.' That is by far your most powerful message: open hand, extended . . . ."*

*"What are you leaving behind for someone else to cherish? How will your neighbor, your industry, your world be better for having encountered you? . . . ."*

*"If your truth calls in the middle of life's forest, and you're not there to hear it, it will not make a sound, a mark, or a difference."*

— *Community experience manufacturers.* It has been said that "people are the products of their experiences," but associations create experiences as their products.

— *Better world makers.* Associations help their members and the world at large reach the next level of societal improvement. They know how "wealthy the inner self can get when we trade progressing profits for profitable progress."

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*"We are all primary stakeholders in our society. We can no longer afford to make dollars that don't make change."*

— Sekou Andrews

— *Next-level enablers.* Associations are the gateway to the next level of whatever members want to achieve. The ASAE conference itself is manifestation of this "next-

mindedness." Association professionals are driven to catch the next wave, understand the next new thing, network with empathetic experts, and take their industry conversations to the next level.

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*"The next round is on you. Let the next begin!"*

— Sekou Andrews

### ▪ Above all, associations are alchemists.

Motivated by the drive to help ("open hand, extended") and inspiring members to lift each other's boats ("not to win but to win/win"), associations create passionate communities of members who "do twice the work, make twice the progress, and skyrocket each other's worth."

By putting purpose, performance, and people first, associations are alchemists who transform the lives of members in need. Sekou Andrews' rousing closing words may express this best:

## Sekou Andrews on Associations' Alchemy

*"All you did was put purpose first, put performance first, and put people first. This is the true alchemy by which you conjure water from thirst.*

*"This is in your blood; it is all you know; it is who you are; it is what you do: You harness the purpose within your service to help your neighbors succeed. You craft meaningful messages out of metal. You pull solutions from stories. You teach your fellow man how to fellowship. You turn friends into families.*

*"You are the glue that holds together countless communities. You each wield the power to enrich the lives of members in need. You are alchemists!*

*"This is the true power within your work and your legacy. And this is all that I've come here to remind you every time that you all call yourselves 'associations.' Please."*

## Is the Price Right?

- Speaker: **Suzanne Carawan**, Chief Marketing Officer, *HighRoad Solution*

### Overview

Most associations approach pricing all wrong. There is a stigma against attacking the pricing question as businesses do. But associations may forget that pricing and marketing (where pricing rightfully resides) are logical disciplines based on proven principles as taught in business schools. Practicing pricing as the business world does would do wonders for associations' revenue streams and marketing functions.

### Context

Drawing from her work with HighRoad Solution's association clients—as well as a November 2014 benchmarking study and her corporate marketing background—Suzanne Carawan shared a better way for associations to think about pricing.

### Key Takeaways

- **Pricing is rightfully a function of marketing, no other department.**

Too often in associations, the process of pricing is not disciplined and strategic but emotional, governed by gut instinct or competitors' pricing or tradition. But pricing is a scientific, academic discipline with logical principles that work to fetch the best prices markets will bear.

And too often in associations, the process doesn't reside with marketing where it belongs. "Price" is one of the classic "Four Ps" of marketing. A marketer who doesn't price is in a communications job—and represents overhead. If you're in association marketing and toiling with an insufficient budget, tie your role to revenue generation; nothing makes the case for a bigger budget better than generating revenue. There are plenty of opportunities to drive incremental revenue via digital marketing, just as it's done in the corporate world.

- **The way most associations price is error-fraught.**

Association people don't like pricing, typically; there is a subtext that it is somehow wrong. Little time and research goes into it; it feels like a one-time shot in the dark. As a result, it is not informed by data or testing or customer personas or an understanding of what markets will bear. Few associations feel entitled to dictate to the market the worth of their product as corporations do (e.g., Apple, BMW), creating demand. But associations are ideally positioned to do that as authoritative voices in their niches.

However, most associations attack pricing in the most simplistic of ways: just slapping a profit margin onto their cost of goods sold (COGS)—and forgetting to add in the biggest cost, labor (an omission unique to associations)—

then rounding to the nearest \$9 (webinars are invariably priced at \$59!). Money is often left on the table.

- **Traditional product marketing disciplines will serve your association far better.**

Associations should price using the traditional methodology of the corporate product marketing discipline. Corporate marketers continually experiment with products and price points, and carry P&L responsibilities so that they are accountable for succeeding at generating revenue growth. They follow a set methodology: 1) decide strategy; 2) decide target markets; 3) set price; 4) set time frames; 5) test, retest.

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*"This is traditional corporate marketing. There's an actual methodology. You can get a degree in it, the whole bit."*

— Suzanne Carawan

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Notably, some pricing strategies that associations still use are increasingly inappropriate in today's world. These include "captive pricing," which lures people in at low introductory price points and then charges for every additional service. That irritates Millennials, who want a single transparent price. "Competitive" (i.e., low) pricing may also backfire, lowering member perceptions of value. Some best practices in pricing:

- *Understand social trends changing how consumers consume* (e.g., the research-first consumer, the have-it-my-way consumer, the sample-first consumer).
- *Consider monthly payment plans (jibing with how we view income) and bundle plans.* When unsure of a price point, make it the middle of three tiers and watch consumer behavior to gauge value perceptions.
- *Understand your market;* define customer personas.
- *Test your assumptions.* Many assumptions are wrong; e.g., students won't spend, retirees won't attend.
- *Research competitive offerings, personas, and willingness to pay (test your guesstimates!).* Solicit consumer feedback and test market before rolling out.

### Other Important Points

- **Pricing resources.** Learn more about pricing at [ASAE's New Product Development Framework](#), [Pragmatic Marketing](#), [Avenue M](#).
- **Be counted!** Participate in HighRoad Solution's update to its [2014 State of Digital Marketing in Associations](#) benchmarking study. Find out more [here](#).

## The Evolving Role of Communications in Associations

- Speakers: **Bill Cramer**, Communications Director, *International Bridge, Tunnel and Turnpike Association*  
**Michael Cummings, MBA**, Principal, *Tate/Cummings*  
**Gwen Fortune-Blakely**, Director, Enterprise-wide Marketing, *American Speech-Language-Hearing Association*  
**Amy Goldenberg, PhD**, Managing Editor, *Anthropology News*, *American Anthropology Association*  
**Addy Kujawa, CAE**, Executive Director, *American Association of Orthopaedic Executives*

### Overview

ASAE's informal research on the role of communications professionals in associations today has found that they wear many hats. There is a blurring of the lines between communications and other functions as all departments communicate with members these days and share in creating and conveying member value.



### Context

Michael Cummings discussed ASAE research on communications roles within associations, and the professionals on the panel shared learnings from their communications, marketing, and leadership careers.

### Key Takeaways

- Lines are blurring between communications and other association functions.**

Communications professionals today wear many hats; indeed, few of the communications professionals in this session's audience said that they work in specialty communication roles.

Moreover, communications roles cultivate transferrable skills. The careers of two panelists are cases in point: Addy Kujawa moved from PR in an association into her current executive director role. Gwen Fortune-Blakely was formerly a marketing executive in the corporate world before heading up marketing for ASHA. Both could demonstrate in interviews how their backgrounds had primed them for their current positions' strategic demands, creating and communicating value for members.

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*"To have that background was huge, as I was able to share and promote and persuade—all things I'd learned in P.R."*  
— Addy Kujawa

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Other findings of the ASAE study included:

- *"Communications"* is the imparting or exchanging of information to identify, inform, or persuade.
- *Communications work* in associations today encompasses a wide range of activities, largely determined by the type and focus of the association, as well as by staff and budget size.

- *Communications activities* dovetail with those required for promoting, marketing, and even leading associations in today's digital world (see word cloud).

- *The skills required by communications roles* are highly transferrable, particularly into positions requiring strategic vision. These skills include writing, visual arts, technology skills, math, marketing and sales, and strategic planning.

- Communications cut across all departments.**

Nearly every department in associations communicates with members these days. At ASHA, Gwen Fortune-Blakely's marketing department works closely with the other teams to ensure they are working to build member value and using consistent messaging as they dialogue with members. She also encourages all teams to create long-term strategic plans to focus their efforts. She shares with them her "cascade" methodology for long-term planning (which helped former employer Marriott stay competitive by anticipating future market challenges).

- Best practices include creating a strategic communication plan.**

The perspectives the panelists shared yielded many best practices in association communications, including:

- *Consider hiring communications consultants*, as IBTTA does, for a more flexible labor cost model and high-quality work from professionals who aren't pulled in multiple directions at once as in-house employees are.
- *Set out departmental priorities in a strategic plan*, kept by your desk, so that when other departments ask for your time, you can ask them what priority should get bumped. Disruptive requests will occur less often.
- *When you enter new positions, listen hard and respectfully before you share your vision*. Be a change agent in nonthreatening ways that don't bulldoze over others.

## Define Engagement So It's More Than a Buzzword

- Speakers: **Maddie Grant, CAE**, Partner, *Culture That Works LLC*  
**Joe Vallina, MSM, CAE**, Publisher & Director of Publishing, *American Nurses Association*

### Overview

Member engagement: we all know it's a good thing; we all try to promote it. But it means different things to different people. Until an association has identified those intangibles and tangibles that stimulate engagement for its members, can it really manage engagement? Managing engagement requires spotting it when it is happening, measuring its strength, and pulling the right levers to enhance it.

An analytical deep dive into engagement at the American Nurses Association began with defining what it means for a membership characterized by strong professional pride. Defining engagement for that group was the first step of a systematic process to identify how best to strengthen it.

### Context

This interactive session gave the audience a taste of the work Maddie Grant has been doing with the American Nurses Association to home in on what member engagement means for the ANA and identify its levers.

### Key Takeaways

- Defining engagement in your association is a critical first step to influencing it.**

While "engagement" is a common buzzword, everyone comes to the table with a different definition of it. The first step, therefore, of Maddie Grant's work with the ANA involved defining what engagement means for the nurses that compose the association's membership. Associations generally recognize six buckets of engagement indicators:

- *Purchases*. Buying activity tends to correlate with strength of engagement.
- *Member satisfaction*. The more satisfied, the greater likelihood of engagement; the "Net Promoter Score" (borrowed from business) is a good measure of satisfaction.
- *Content*. The more content members consume and create online, the more engaged they tend to be.
- *Volunteering*. This strong engagement indicator comes with a caveat: make sure there are enough roles for all willing volunteers, or risk disengaging those turned down.
- *Community*. Much research shows that participation in online communities correlates highly with engagement.



— *Stickiness*. "Stickiness" connotes engagement strength. Serving on a board is stickier than reading a newsletter.

The first three indicators listed above are consumption-related (bottom tier in graphic), with weaker engagement correlations than the middle tier of participatory activities; those aren't as strong as "stickiness." The goal is to move members up the rungs.

- For the ANA, engagement reflects both surface-level transactional activities and deep connection.**

Before writing its definition, ANA participants listed attributes suggesting engagement; they fell into two groups: surface ("information," "time," "money," "exchange," "services") and deep ("involved," "value," "synergy," "invested," "connected," "relationships," "identity"). One key insight uncovered: member engagement is a two-way street. The ANA's final definition:

*"[T]he investment—of time, money, attention, and participation—by BOTH the members and the association, focused on providing synergistic, meaningful, ongoing, and mutually beneficial experiences and long-term relationships that advance the profession."*

- Next steps include an audit, mapping engagement strength, and finding ways to move the needle.**

Next up in ANA's engagement work:

- Audit and gap analysis*. Cross-silo workshop participants analyze lists of all the association's engagement-generating activities they can identify.
- Mapping*. Each activity is mapped on a four-quadrant matrix: High/low reach, high/low stickiness.
- Improving*. For each activity (deemed worth keeping), three ways to shift engagement to higher quadrants are identified: one big idea, one meaningful improvement, and one quick win.
- Vetting*. Ideas are vetted and presented to executives.

## It's the End of the Website As We Know It

- Speakers: **David Coriale, MBA**, President, *DelCor Technology Solutions*  
**Reggie Henry, CAE**, Chief Information Officer, *ASAE*  
**Russell Magnuson**, CEO & Chief Technology Officer, *Results Direct*  
**Cecilia Satovich**, SVP, Client Services, *Results Direct*

### Overview

The intuitive, personalized experience that shoppers now are treated to by retail giants like Amazon, Apple, and Zappos is shortening people's patience for delayed gratification. We are all becoming used to getting what we want when we want it. Amid these shifting expectations, how can mere associations deliver digital experiences that don't disappoint? Associations are struggling to meet users' expectations for efficient and personalized online experiences while conveying their value propositions in relevant ways.

There is no magic bullet to solve these challenges, but there are mentalities that associations can adopt.

### Context

The panelists shared advice to start associations down the road of rethinking their digital experiences in light of how people consume information these days.

### Key Takeaways

- Websites remain relevant, but warrant rethinking.**

Websites are not irrelevant (yet?). However, apps increasingly are people's first go-to source of information and often the first point of access to your organization. Simply making your website "responsive" to read well on any device is not enough of an adaptation to the new phone-centric reality. Most associations have information-laden websites with numerous microsites; wading through them for the information sought seems like finding a needle in a haystack. And a 100-page haystack expands to 500 pages when accessed via smartphone.

How consumers consume has changed. Not only do people want what they want right away but they want it to be customized to their preferences (think Starbucks).

Amid these new realities, are associations' websites still conveying their value propositions as effectively as possible? Not many audience members thought so. Some associations are grappling with this challenge. The rest need to start rethinking whether what they offer as a digital experience meets their users' current expectations.

- View the challenges as businesses would.**

Many associations are handicapped in adjusting to this new reality by counterproductive modes of thinking and decision making. For example, "more is better" is the prevailing attitude when it comes to website content, even though that is no longer true. Websites and apps (especially) should be pared back to the information that matters most. What matters most is not subjective, to be decided by vote, but a straightforward function of what content is accessed the most by your most valuable users. Spend resources on optimizing their experiences solely, and let less valuable users do as they will. When association relevance is at stake in a world where people have many options for getting much of what associations offer, this hard-nosed approach is warranted. No longer can associations strive to be all things to all people. They will wind up serving no one well.

In short, associations need to think more like businesses, using analytical decision-making processes informed by data. The data needs to come from testing what works and from measuring users' actual behavior (instead of relying on member surveys).

Other common cultural obstacles include: 1) associations tend to lack discipline in tagging content so that it is readily found; 2) website accountability and authority often are misaligned: the person accountable for the association's online presence should make decisions about it; and 3) associations tend to think they need to manage the member relationship; that's an outdated mindset.

- One panelist's advice: facilitate user customization.**

For Reggie Henry, the crux of the challenge is embracing today's technologies. Associations should find the IT solution that would allow website users to design and manage their own experiences. For associations to address personalization manually would be impossible. The next generation of association website might feature user-customized experiences via systems that limit the extraneous clutter users see as they are presented only with content that is relevant for them.

Best practices include having a "brutal conversation" internally about the member value proposition, optimizing how technology serves the highest-value member segments, and taking an incremental approach to change so that initiatives actually get done.

## Show and Tell: Learn from Gold Circle Award Winners

- Moderator: **Tom Quash, CAE**, Vice President, Marketing, Communications and Publications, *AWHONN*
- Speakers: **Louise Bannon**, Director, Marketing & Membership, *International Society on Thrombosis and Haemostasis*  
**Janelle Scudder**, Communications Manager, *DECA*  
**Michael Voss**, Director, Brand Management, *International Coach Federation*  
**Christopher Young**, High School Division Director, *DECA*

### Overview

The three Gold Circle Award-winning organizations profiled in this session all achieved spectacular feats of engagement through initiatives reflecting innovative thinking and bold execution. All of the ideas entailed risk or expense, faced differing degrees of internal resistance, and won over internal skeptics by delivering measurable results.

### Context

The panelists shared the stories of their associations' award-winning initiatives, drawn out by moderator and vice chair of ASAE's Gold Circle Awards Committee Tom Quash.

### Key Takeaways

- **ASAE's Gold Circle Awards recognize initiatives reflecting excellence, innovation, and achievement.**

ASAE's Gold Circle Awards recognize associations that have demonstrated excellence, innovation, and achievement in 16 categories related to marketing, membership, and communications. The year-long program culminates in awards given out just prior to the MM&C conference. (More information and an application are available [here](#).)

Notably, all three associations represented in this session received more than one Gold Circle Award. Another association this year won for a program built around best practices learned from the story of a prior Gold Circle winner. An important mission behind the award program is the sharing of best practices and actionable ideas that other associations can readily implement.

- **ISTH started a global movement to raise awareness about thrombosis.**

The International Society on Thrombosis and Haemostasis (ISTH) won the Overall Award of Excellence for the landmark movement it ignited to elevate the global conversation about thrombosis and blood clots. One in four people dies of blood clots.

What began with a steering committee of international leaders committed to developing research and shareable content culminated less than a year later in the first Global Thrombosis Day (October 13, 2014). The strategy was to build global communities that are passionate about raising thrombosis awareness, provide them with encouragement and tools (turnkey, downloadable content), and cross

fingers that they would do the rest. A boutique PR firm was retained to help generate excitement.

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*"We're 11 people; we can't do everything. But if we build communities, they can execute it. People got very excited."*  
— Louise Bannon

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The plan worked better than ISTH could have imagined: while 20 countries was the metric targeted, 50 joined in, along with 10 corporate sponsors. Ms. Bannon credits the relationship-based, grassroots nature of the initiative and how strongly people everywhere care about this cause.

Lessons learned: manage people's expectations, and put systems in place to cut down on inefficiencies.

- **DECA leveraged social media for a hit convention.**

DECA won the Gold Circle Award in Meetings Marketing for its wildly successful 2014 convention. The social media buzz generated by the excited students planning to attend was phenomenal (DECA is an association dedicated to promoting students' leadership development). The metrics that DECA set as goals were dwarfed by the results, including 14,000 tweets (versus the 10,000 goal), and an email open rate of 21% (versus 15%). A 70-foot wall at the convention showcased student-generated social media content from Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc. There is little doubt that the convention was accountable for the surge in new members DECA picked up in 2014 (10,000).

Lessons learned: moderate and filter member-generated content (especially by teen members!). Keep your eyes peeled for the next big thing in social media.

- **The International Coach Federation tapped a gold mine of new members via LinkedIn.**

This association for professional coaches (mission: to advance the art, science, and practice of professional coaching) won the Gold Circle Award for Membership. ICF invested \$25,000 for advanced LinkedIn services, as it realized that thousands of potential new members could be reached that way since one of the association's LinkedIn groups had nearly 50,000 participants, while its own membership was locked at 20,000. That \$25,000 investment returned \$465,000 in new member revenue.

Lesson learned: be aware of places representing untapped member potential.

## The Ultimate MarComm Cheat Sheet

- Speakers: **Lauren Hefner, CAE**, Director, Member Care, *Healthcare Businesswomen's Association*  
**Scott Oser**, President, *Scott Oser Associates*

### Overview

The Internet runneth over with marketing/communication advice for attracting, retaining, and engaging members via the latest in content marketing techniques and today's technologies. But who has time to find the gold amid the junk? No need: the speakers have done that work for you. They have found the most useful "marcomm" advice that cyberspace—and their own work experiences—have to offer. Their "cheat sheet" includes tactics to get the desired responses from prospects and members, best-practice ways of working to prevent becoming derailed, outside-the-box engagement ideas, and reminders that bear repeating.

### Context

The presenters ran through 50-some communications and marketing best practices, divided into six thematic buckets (prospecting, engagement, retention, content marketing, social media, and the website). The audience contributed more insights, which were incorporated into the final cheat sheet, available on ASAE's conference website.

### Key Takeaways

- In membership prospecting, track, track, track!**

Select membership prospecting cheat sheet items:

- Prospect within your own backyard. Non-member attendees at your events are low-hanging fruit. So are members with large industry networks.
- Remember A/B testing and segmenting. Prospects call for different messaging, not having been won over yet.
- Frequently review the "path to join." Make it simple.
- Track, track, track. Track all efforts in all channels or you will never be able to see what is working.
- Create membership ambassadors. Members reaching out to prospects often fare better than staff.

- Member engagement: set clear, measurable goals.**

What goals will deepen your member engagement? Pick ones that can be measured, so you can determine what works to engage and what doesn't. More engagement tips:

- Determine the best delivery method(s) for your membership.
- Be consistently there. Stay in front of members on a regular basis, not just when time to renew.
- Offer volunteer opportunities for members at all stages.

- Offer scholarships to members in transition. Don't lose members to temporary unemployment.

- Member retention: focus on first-year members.**

First-year members are least likely to renew. Employ special tactics to retain them. But don't ignore long-term members; spend time promoting them. More retention advice:

- Re-examine your promotable benefits.
- Understand why members join. Welcome them properly.
- "Pay" members for volunteered time with recognition.
- Examine payment options. Think them through carefully.
- Offer early-renew discounts to those who tend not to.

- Content marketing: leverage your field's elite.**

Make content marketing an organizational initiative, with the content written by the experts in the field, not marketers. Solicit content from your field's influencers, "dragging these content elite into your sandbox." If they have been involved, they will share the product among wide networks. Also:

- Repurpose engaging content, giving it different twists in different formats (videos, blogs, reports, etc.).
- Stick to a content marketing calendar.
- Give away "teaser" content for free, but not too much of it.
- Add your insights to re-tweeted/recycled content.
- Curate with the sales funnel in mind. Use content designed to move prospects closer to converting to members.

- Social media and websites: set SMART goals.**

Tracking online initiatives to understand what works is critical. That means setting "SMART goals": Specific, Mission-driven, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-based. It also means measuring ROIs so you can improve them. More tips:

- *Social media*: Establish posting roles and calendars, and stick to them. Switch up content formats to keep things interesting. Use hashtags consistently and sparingly. Batch tweets by topic, so they are easier to follow.
- *Websites*: Use responsive design, intuitive navigation, plenty of calls to action, and enough white space. Remove outdated content, especially anything with old pricing.