

Member Retention Tactics: Low Investment, High Impact



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When you work at a small association, you can't always afford the member retention tools that larger organizations have access to. Fortunately, there are many tactics we can implement that don't cost very much.

How do you know when a member is unhappy? Unfortunately, members tend not to articulate their disappointment; they simply don't renew. But a good place to try solve problems early is through your membership survey or conference attendee evaluation. When reviewing those results, nothing is quite as illuminating as the write-in comments.

Most of us close our eyes, take a deep breath, and mentally prepare to read these write-in comments. Some of them are encouraging: "Pat is great! Registration was fast and easy!" Others are kind of funny: "Last year we had fish with a nutty sauce. It was delicious! Why no fish this year?" But some comments, of course, can be downright nasty. It's best to read them through and then take a day or two break before re-reading them. When viewed as a collective, you will discover common themes that will help you determine some meaningful changes.

Most attendees, of course, are not aware of what it takes to make changes to an event. To them, free WiFi



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may be as easy as flipping a switch and extending the exhibit floor's hours as basic as filling out a form.



Mundane activities such as a call to headquarters or a 90-second registration-desk interaction may be the only engagement some members ever have with association staff. Take advantage of that moment to build a relationship.

That being said, we can do a lot to leave members satisfied—without breaking the bank.

Smile. A warm smile, even when you are on the phone, can go a long way. The seemingly mundane activities such as a call to headquarters to inquire about a lost password or a 90-second registration-desk interaction may very well be the only engagement that some members ever have with your association's staff. Take advantage of that moment to begin to build a relationship. If time allows, ask them a little bit about themselves and if they are enjoying their membership. If you find yourself dealing with a difficult person, smile: It's impossible to lose your cool when you are smiling.

Password recovery. If you have a members-only section on your site and do not have a "forgot password?" widget, you will get calls. Your password recovery system can be as simple as a document with the passwords of "frequent flyers" but you must have a system, including a backup staff person.

Dust off the fax machine. Yes, many, many members still rely on this beeping, chirping, 20th-century device. It may be a hassle and a last resort, but if that is literally the only way that a segment of your members will renew their memberships, so be it.

Manage expectations. People who work in associations are programmed to want to help people; it's in our DNA. But, in our zeal to please, we often make unrealistic promises such as "I'll get back to you with an answer by the end of the day." Be realistic. Better to overestimate timeframe and get back to someone ahead of time than vice versa.

"Hello, my name is." For a variety of reasons, some groups may need to print generic badges without the names of attendees. Sometimes it is too labor intensive or time consuming or there is a snafu of some sort. If that is the case, consider leaving space on the badges for attendees to handwrite their names. Provide markers or, better yet, identify a sponsor for branded markers.

Headshot lounge. Today, managing our social media profile is de rigueur, yet so many of our members do not have access to professional headshots. Consider hiring a headshot photographer for your members at your next event. It is a simple, tangible member benefit that leaves everyone happy.

Take photographs. Remember the excitement of flipping through your high school yearbook? Remember the thrill of locating photos of you and your friends, or the agony of finding none? Members are very similar: Most love to appear in the newsletter or in other association marketing channels. Meanwhile, hiring a professional photographer for your event is still an incredible value: For well under \$1,000 you can get hundreds of shots that you can use in your membership brochures, social media channels, website, and exhibitor prospectus.

New members. Make a notation of new members expected at events and introduce yourself to them. If you do not have a membership committee, identify volunteers to serve as new-member buddies ahead of time.

Onsite directions. Is your meeting buried deep within the "East Wing Mezzanine" of a meeting center or in "Sycamore Room C" of a busy hotel? Many new members can feel intimidated and frazzled if they lose their bearings. Ensure that a uniformed staffer or even a temp is on site premeeting to direct attendees.

It doesn't take a lot to make many members happy. What are your favorite, low-investment, high-impact tactics member retention activities? Please share in the comments below.

Tags:  [MEMBERSHIP RECRUITMENT & RETENTION](#)  [MEMBER ENGAGEMENT](#)

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