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the Membership Management *report*

THE MONTHLY IDEA SOURCE FOR THOSE WHO RECRUIT, MANAGE AND SERVE MEMBERS.

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Examine Why Members Leave

If you've had a sudden drop in membership, don't just blame it on the economy and fail to seek a solution. Rather, consider the possible reasons for the drop, then take action to reverse the trend.

Gather your membership committee and ask these questions to find solutions to the dip in membership:

- Do our members feel that meetings are useful and engaging?
- Are members encouraged to speak at meetings and contribute to the greater good of our organization?
- Do members feel as though the organization's goals match their interests?
- Are members finding the meetings to be too time consuming?
- Does our nonprofit encourage diversity?
- Do members feel rewarded and feel as though they benefit from membership?
- Has membership become cliquish, appearing to be open to only a select group? How can we overcome that?

Find answers to these questions by polling members, hosting a member retreat or creating a clearly defined survey as a first solid step to reducing member attrition.

DELIVERING ON MEMBERS' WANTS, NEEDS

Learn to Think Differently About Membership

Remember the days when people renewed their association memberships as quickly as they refilled their post-it note supplies? Unfortunately, this investment doesn't come quite as automatically today. So, where have all the "joiners" gone?

"There's a stronger tendency for working professionals to go it alone and fend for themselves," says Mark Shafer, director of marketing for The Risk Management Association (Philadelphia, PA). "People job-hop more today than back in the 'good ol' days.' This behavior isn't necessarily conducive to joining an association." To overcome the challenges posed by these new trends, associations must remain relevant. Doing so involves getting closer to members than before. "Really knowing and owning the issues they face while speaking their language is key to overcoming relevancy obstacles," Shafer says.

The secret to success lies in consistently delivering members' wants and needs, and the following exercises will help association executives think differently about the concept of membership:

1. **Kill the association.** "You and your teammates are on a mission. Your assignment is to create a fictional association whose sole mission is to put your real association out of business," Shafer says. "Consider factors like the products, pricing and membership models you would offer." You'll be forced to consider your association's vulnerabilities from an outside perspective.
2. **Start at the center of the maze.** "Visualize a children's maze. Though there are many paths in, there is only one correct path out. If you start at the center, you will easily find the path that leads to the outside," Shafer says. "Begin with the endpoint in mind and work backwards from that position to identify the most successful approach."
3. **Reconsider calling the usual suspects.** "When tasked with a vexing challenge, we often call in the 'usual suspects' to figure something out. This is logical and very often the most expedient way to proceed, but the 'usual suspects' have the 'usual perspectives,'" Shafer says. "Instead, ask your IT people to represent the voice of your member, your finance team to represent your product development team, your salespeople to help remedy process issues. Listen carefully to their ideas, and you'll no doubt gain new insights."
4. **Think inside the box.** "We're always told to 'think outside the box,' but most of us are totally incapable of it. And what does it really mean? Totally off-the-wall solutions that aren't solutions at all?" Shafer inquires. "Thinking inside the box is about facing the realities of your situation — real-life business challenges that need tackling head-on. It's said that necessity is the mother of invention, and that's the basis for thinking inside the box. Ernest Hemingway was once challenged to write a novel using only six words. He wrote his novel: 'Baby shoes for sale: never worn.'"

Source: Mark Shafer, Director of Marketing, The Risk Management Association, Philadelphia, PA. Phone (215) 446-4120. E-mail: mshafer@rmahq.org. Website: www.rmahq.org

Three Easy Ways To Gain New Members

Members are the lifeblood of every membership-based organization.

Try these three ways to inject new blood into your organization and reinvigorate your membership program in 2018 and beyond:

1. Raffle a free membership to community members.
2. Remind members to bring friends to the next event or meeting. Have membership packets handy at the meeting, be ready and willing to answer any questions, and host a drawing for free membership — all new arrivals eligible.
3. Ask members for names of friends and colleagues who would benefit from membership. Send this group a personal invitation to attend your next special event.

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Know How Your Leadership Team Impacts Membership Drive Success

By Erin Sandage

Your membership drive's leadership team can make or break your campaign; they drive the volunteers and donations, and help bring in new members.

For the Cobb Chamber (Marietta, GA), choosing the right campaign chair for its annual membership drive is critical to its success (www.cobbchamber.org/Your-Chamber/Membership-Campaign.aspx).

"He or she serves as the main support for the division chairs as well as the teams and chamber staff working behind the scenes," says Amy Selby, executive vice president. "It is a time-consuming endeavor, and it is important for the chair to be dedicated to the mission and purpose of the chamber. Without a great leader, the volunteers don't feel as enthusiastic about the process."

Choosing the right person for the job is a combined effort between the chamber president and CEO, chairman of the board and the chair-elect. They select a candidate who is an experienced campaign volunteer and an involved chamber member. It's an important appointment because the campaign chair has a long list of responsibilities.

"The campaign chair serves on the board executive committee as the vice chair of the member development department and, in addition to overseeing the membership campaign, is responsible for providing membership updates to the board," says Selby.

The campaign chair also helps choose the rest of the volunteer leadership team. This includes the campaign leadership committee, which is broken down into five division chairs.

"The division chairs are selected by chamber leadership, and the upcoming campaign chair comes from a pool of the most experienced and involved campaign volunteers," adds Selby. "Oftentimes, the campaign chair from one year will serve as a division chair and vice versa."

Each division chair assists a handful of the companies and groups that have volunteered a team. The teams consist of one or two team executives, a captain and the members.

"There is one team captain selected for every \$25,000 of committed production goal," adds Selby. "Teams can be comprised of as many volunteers who have the willingness and capacity to participate."

This hierarchy has been used for more than 30 years. It has led to the success of several campaigns, including the 2018 campaign Chamber Connects, which was a record-breaking year.

"Our 2018 membership campaign was the highest-grossing campaign in the event's 37-year history," says John Loud, 2018 membership campaign chair. "The key factors that made the difference were the energy behind a new president and CEO and the exciting economic developments happening within the county. With the chamber leading with a new vision and creating job growth for Cobb County, it made for an easier sell for our volunteers to recruit new business members."

Source: Amy Selby, Executive Vice President, Marketing and Communications, Cobb Chamber, Marietta, GA. Phone (770) 859-2350. E-mail: ASelby@cobbchamber.org. Website: www.cobbchamber.org

COMMUNICATING WITH MEMBERS

Effective Online Communications Tips

The bulk of communication between members and colleagues in today's working climate takes place online. Follow these tips for effective online communication:

- Reread your e-mail before sending. This extra step will allow you to evaluate the tone of your message.
- Establish a time frame for online responses. Consider establishing a standard within your organization of responding to e-mails within 24 hours.
- Do not write an e-mail message when upset. Your mood can easily translate into an online communication. Let cool heads prevail.

Connect With Members Using ‘Sonomojis’

By Megan Venzin

When Sarah receives a text reply from her mother depicting a hand holding an ultrasound probe, she understands that her mother is busy at work, likely doing a sonogram. Emojis provide a storytelling shortcut, giving users the ability to communicate their feelings quickly with a clear and concise visual. “Sonomojis” do the exact same thing, but with sonography-specific images.

Every October, the Society of Diagnostic Medical Sonography (SDMS; Plano, TX) celebrates Medical Ultrasound Awareness Month (MUAM). In 2017, their theme for MUAM took the form of a campaign titled Sonomoji: Express Yourself, for which SDMS modified existing emojis and created new ones to fit the unique needs of their members — diagnostic medical sonographers. To date, the campaign has yielded an ROI of 1091 percent through sales of Apple Sticker Packs, apps for other mobile devices and related merchandise. It also took home an American Society of Association Executives (ASAE) 2018 Gold Circle Merit Award for its ingenuity and playfulness. A gallery of SDMS’s award-winning Sonomojis can be seen here: sonomoji.sdms.org/.

“Electronic communication has become an integral part of our everyday life, and it is important to have emojis that reflect the realities, joys and frustrations of a professional’s chosen career,” says SDMS Chief Marketing Officer Kelly G. Stafford. “The positive buzz generated by the Sonomojis and the fun had by sonographers was priceless.” Stafford says sonographers used the Sonomojis not only in their texts and social media posts, but also to decorate their exam rooms, school projects and even Halloween pumpkins.

SDMS generated ideas for Sonomojis by seeking member input via social media posts and one-on-one conversations. “Make sure you understand what your members find funny and frustrating about their careers,” Stafford says. “Industry-specific emojis only work if they truly represent the members.”

The Sonomojis, which were designed by SDMS’s in-house graphic designers, continue to be a big hit. Outlets such as e-mail, social media posts, paid social media ads and print ads in their peer-reviewed scientific journal have been used to spread the word about this quirky new communication tool. “Be ready to provide tech support for members who download your emojis,” Stafford says. Providing step-by-step instructions on how to access the emojis, as well as other troubleshooting topics ensure that everyone is in on the fun.

Source: Kelly G. Stafford, Chief Marketing Officer, Society of Diagnostic Medical Sonography, Plano, TX. Phone (800) 229-9506. E-mail: kstafford@sdms.org. Website: www.sdms.org

ICEBREAKERS YOU CAN USE

Get Members Talking Using M&M’s®

If you’re hosting a meeting where members or other participants know little about each other, try this:

Pass around a bowl of M&M’s®, inviting participants to help themselves but to not eat the candy quite yet.

Once the bowl has made the rounds, explain that each person must tell something about him/herself for each M&M® he/she took.

Take this a step further by assigning a particular topic to each M&M® color — blue for hobbies, red for an embarrassing moment, and so forth.

Attendees will have fun learning about one another in this creative icebreaker.



To Attract Members, Define Member Characteristics

If you’re in the market to sign on new members, consider defining what a potential member for your nonprofit looks like to help determine where and when to make a membership pitch.

What characteristics would a potential member for your organization have?

Defining these potential member characteristics will also enable existing members, volunteers and staff to more readily identify a new member in the making.

Consider the following characteristics as possibilities:

- Nonmembers who are attending or have attended meetings. Be sure to capture the names and contact information of all who attend so that membership materials can be mailed to those who are not currently members.
- Persons who have inquired about membership and completed a member application but have not followed through with enrolling and paying membership dues. Don’t let these potential members slip through the cracks ... contact them today!
- College students or recent graduates. Determine if a local college offer could be made to would-be members upon or prior to graduation. Getting young, new recruits can be a boon for your nonprofit and will assist the recent graduate as well.
- Employees of local firms. Seek out corporations within your community aligned with the practices of your membership. Offer a corporate group membership rate to any corporation enrolling 10 or more employees as new members.
- Persons seeking to pad their résumés. In today’s tumultuous employment market, consider those potential members who could gain by acquiring new skills while they are unemployed by becoming a member of your organization. Consider offering a special membership rate to those suffering a job loss.
- Members of complementary causes. Is there an organization in your community that is a natural fit to yours? Consider partnering with this organization to offer a dual membership that could conceivably bring more members your way.

Create a Custom Communications Audit

It is essential to engage your members and recruit new ones. But are you using the right communication tools to do both effectively? You need to perform a communication audit to see which channels (e-mail, newsletter, website, social media and public relations) have the biggest impact on member engagement.

Michael Cummings, principal of Tate/Cummings in New York City, NY, says a communication audit allows you to reallocate activities, sunset underperforming activities or introduce new activities. Since associations have finite resources, yet there are a huge variety of communication options, he says it's important to identify which have the best ROI to support and promote programs and to engage members.

"Ideally, we would all focus less on using multiple methods of communication (content distribution) to reach members and focus more on improving the actual content of what we are distributing (content creation)," he adds.

Cummings says there are at least five steps involved in an audit:

1. Determine and rank your audiences such as members, prospects, partners/sponsors, the public and staff.
2. Identify all your communication activities and determine which audiences are reached through those methods.
3. Gather the metrics for each of these methods (such as open rates, comments, shares, likes and impressions).
4. Determine a cost for each communication activity (e.g., the amount of staff hours spent converted into dollars and out-of-pocket expenses such as hiring a consultant).
5. Lastly, determine which of the association's strategic objectives are supported by each activity.

The good news is a communication audit doesn't have to be expensive. Cummings says it may cost only one staff member using his or her time to do the research, maybe 10 hours over three to four weeks. But it could also be more complex, even requiring hiring a consultant.

"It depends upon the size of the association, its goals, and the breadth and depth of its existing communication efforts," he adds. "While a member audit relies upon a dialogue (typically vis-à-vis a survey) and may include questions about communication preferences, the replies are just that: preferences. With a communication audit, an analysis of communications activities is performed, as well as their actual usage, engagement and impact."

Source: Michael Cummings, Principal, Tate/Cummings, New York City, NY. Phone (646) 241-7748. E-mail: mcummings@tatecumplings.com. Website: www.tatecumplings.com

Five Ways to Market Gift Memberships

Flowers wither and chocolates are gobbled up in an instant, but memories last a lifetime. Memberships truly are the gifts that keep on giving.

Educational experiences produce priceless moments, which is why annual memberships become hot-ticket items around the holiday season and other special occasions. In fact, Longwood Gardens, a 1,083-acre public garden located in Kennett Square, PA, typically sells between 4,500 and 5,000 memberships between the months of November and December.

"A good portion of our revenue stream is dependent upon the success of December, so we've looked at specific strategies to make it easier for members to give Longwood as a gift," says Associate Director of Membership Melissa Dietrich. "Every year we evaluate what works, and then we keep advancing. As our membership goals increase, we have to find new ways to meet those goals."

Dietrich shares five ways Longwood Gardens is marketing its gift memberships:

1. **Early bird discounts.** Instead of waiting until Black Friday, members are incentivized to buy gift memberships starting the Friday before Thanksgiving at a discount. This also means that purchasers receive their gifts in plenty of time for the holidays. "Starting the sale early relieves some of the production stress that falls on us at that time," Dietrich says.
2. **Extended beginning/expiration dates.** Gift memberships purchased by current members during the holiday sale begin immediately and last through January 31st of the next year, essentially extending 14 months of unlimited admission for the same price as 12. "In instances when members won't see their loved ones until after the holidays, we still want their recipients to get a full year of exploring our beautiful gardens," Dietrich says.
3. **On-site events.** "Around holidays like Christmas and Mother's Day we host member appreciation days to encourage members to visit our gardens," Dietrich says. "Our members receive a 20 percent discount in our gift shop as well as a chance to purchase gift memberships on-site at a discount. We've found pairing online pushes with signage at on-site events has fabulous results!"
4. **General admission credit.** Single ticket buyers can apply the purchase amount toward a single membership or gift membership for up to 30 days following their visit.
5. **Segmented lists.** When marketing gift memberships, give existing members a special incentive such as a higher discount or an extended expiration date to show your appreciation. Segment your mailing lists so members and single ticket buyers are contacted separately. Doing so can inform targeted messaging and help ease the impact of high volume.

Source: Melissa Dietrich, Associate Director of Membership, Longwood Gardens, Kennett Square, PA. Phone (610) 388-5387. E-mail: mdietrich@longwoodgardens.org. Website: www.longwoodgardens.org

Boost Engagement Through Digital Channels

Digital marketing strategies can help organizations recruit, engage and sustain members but many don't know where to start, how to measure effectiveness or how to create engaging content.

Melissa Harrison, CEO and founder of Allee Creative in Maple Grove, MN, says the first thing an organization should do to implement a digital marketing strategy is to come up with a plan, no matter how simple.

“Decide what it is you want to accomplish. Things such as community engagement and education, increased loyalty/recurring membership, association brand awareness, program requirement, fundraising, donations, overall revenue or employee recruitment and retention,” she says. “Your marketing strategy and initiatives should directly support your association's overall business goals.”

Harrison says at minimum your documented plan should include:

- Objectives and goals.
- Metrics for measuring success.
- Target audience/personas.
- The “what's in it for them?” message(s).
- Channels and frequency.
- Calls to action.
- Budget.
- Timeline.

Digital marketing is more than social media, says Harrison. It includes website content, blogs, e-mail newsletters, webinars, white papers, e-books, videos, etc. Once you have a plan in place, then you can start implementing some of Harrison's best practices to get it up and running:

1. **Get your online “house” in order.** Take a close look at your website to see if it's responsive — easily changing to the screen size or device of user — if it is working properly, easy-to-use and up-to-date. Determine how much of your digital content is truly yours. Your content includes your website, e-mail lists, newsletters and blog. “If you have the bulk of your engaging content on a channel that isn't yours (e.g., If Facebook packed it up and closed down tomorrow), would you still have a viable digital footprint in which your members could engage with you?”
2. **Use content you already have.** Repurpose top-performing e-mail blasts and blog content or take big topics and break them down into bite-sized pieces, images or videos. Ask your membership team for their top FAQs and turn these into digital pieces of content.
3. **Understand your sustaining members.** Look at the demographics of those members to determine what their pain points are, how your strategy offers them solutions and how they want to receive information.
4. **Ask for help.** Associations have a lot of tasks outside of content creation and digital marketing strategies. Harrison suggests outsourcing the jobs that can't be done easily in-house, like hiring an agency for one-time or recurring marketing help.

“Think about your digital marketing strategy — your content marketing strategy — as a journey. One that you'll be on for the long haul, and one that may take a few twists, turns and changes, but one that your members will appreciate and engage with along the way.”

Source: Melissa Harrison, CEO and Founder, Allee Creative, LLC, Maple Grove, MN. Phone (763) 208-1384. E-mail: melissa@alleecreative.com. Website: www.alleecreative.com

Best Digital Strategies for Each Generation

Digital marketing strategies don't just appeal to your youngest members. Melissa Harrison, CEO and founder of Allee Creative, says each of the four generations currently in the workforce can be reached through digital methods. “How you reach out to them depends on the message you're trying to send and your membership model,” she adds. “However, there are a few characteristics of each generation that can help as you think through your membership models and communication strategies to each.”

- **Boomers:** (Born 1946–1964) Boomers are your hard-working, loyal and also competitive members. They are joiners and they can remain loyal to you just in the fact that they've “always” been. Be careful when changing things up with this member base, as they like things to stay consistent. That doesn't mean they don't appreciate digital, though. This group is the largest growing demographic on Facebook.
- **Gen X:** (Born 1965–1981) Self-reliant, these members grew up as latch-key kids. They can be a bit anti-authority but very family-focused. Gen Xers include social media in their daily lives; 86% of them use digital channels every day. They enjoy communication through digital channels because their family and work life keeps them busy, and they want to use their time effectively.
- **Millennials:** (Born 1982–1995) Millennials are your digital thinkers and sometimes come off as having a sense of entitlement. They are not afraid to ask for and voice what they want. They are not joiners by nature, so you must prove what's in it for them. They tend to move from one digital channel to the next, and they're always looking for the next big thing.
- **Generation Z:** (Born 1996–2009) Gen Z's (likely your smallest membership base) are very realistic and creative. They are also hyper-connected and have always had a digital footprint. Gen X parents have been posting about their Gen Z kids since before they were born by sharing sonogram pictures and then first steps, first day of school, etc. Gen Z's have never lived a day without mobile phones, YouTube or social media. They are digital communicators and thinkers to the max.

Explore Alternative Membership Models

Traditional admission and membership models don't always meet the needs of today's nonprofits. That's why more and more museums are opting to switch to a membership model that doesn't follow the status quo.

When the Mingei International Museum (San Diego, CA) announced a year-long closure for a major renovation, it was the perfect time to adjust the membership model as well.

"Our new admission model, once we reopen, will allow visitors in, free of charge, to the museum's main plaza level," says Claire McKee, membership and marketing manager. "We hope to experience a much higher volume of visitors passing through our museum and wanted to offer more of an entry-level membership for them to give the museum a try on an annual basis, but with minimal commitment."

The current admission model includes individual, friends/family, contributor, supporter, patron and director circle options. The new model will still offer these levels, but with slight adjustments to names, benefits and pricing.

"We plan to launch an admission-membership hybrid, a lower-priced option for annual access to the museum's paid galleries, but with no membership benefits," adds McKee. "We also plan to offer the option to upgrade or add on traditional membership benefits to this new pass within a specified period after purchase."

The desire to change the membership structure was due, in part, to current trends that show potential members' unwillingness to drop large sums of money on a single cultural experience. So, when another cultural organization in the area offered an annual admission pass without membership, McKee said they wanted to give their own version a try.

To figure out what to keep and what to add, the museum surveyed members to see which benefits they find most valuable. The insight also confirmed that having a traditional membership model was still important to current members.

The museum reopens in September 2019. McKee says they expect both membership and admission to increase dramatically due to the grand opening of the new space and the shift to the free portion of the museum.

"We plan to do a membership push immediately before reopening to gain new and lapsed members at our current membership rates, before we raise prices at the reopening. In addition, with the option of a new admission-only membership, we expect our overall membership rates to grow dramatically."

Source: Claire McKee, Membership and Marketing Manager, Mingei International Museum, San Diego, CA. Phone (619) 239-0003. E-mail: membership@mingei.org. Website: mingei.org

Kick Your Annual Dinner Up a Notch

Q. *What's one feature of your annual membership dinner that makes it a 'must-attend' event? What distinguishes it from other similar events?*

"Networking is the reason why our annual membership dinner is the 'must-attend' event of the year. With over 1200 attendees, this festive and social event is the place to see and be seen."

— Lynda Amato Bebrowsky,
Executive Vice President Membership and Engagement,
Commerce Lexington Inc., Lexington, KY.
Phone (859) 333-5558. E-mail: lbebrowsky@commercelexington.com.
Website: www.commercelexington.com

"Five years ago, we began convening high school students as members of our Young Philanthropists group. In September, we review the question, 'What is philanthropy and charity?' At this time, we poll them on the issues that they care about most. During winter, we bring in speakers who represent the charities that perform the kind of work we see most reflected in their polls. The following spring, each team is given \$5,000 from our budget to award grants to their favorite and most relevant charities. This year, our Young Philanthropists members were encouraged to keep their grant selections secret until our gala night in May. Our Young Philanthropists became an integral part of this important evening. The students did a fantastic job of treating it like an "Oscars" night, building suspense leading up to the announcements and then posing with the grant recipients holding their big cardboard checks. The adults loved the evening and declared they'd definitely attend next year to once again see the great work of our county's young adults."

— Julianne Buck, Executive Director,
Community Foundation of Grundy County, Morris, IL.
Phone (815) 941-0852. E-mail: julie@cfgrundycounty.com.
Website: www.cfgrundycounty.com

"Each December, Desert Botanical Garden's Patrons Circle members enjoy the Luminarias Party, a special dinner reception held in conjunction with our annual holiday tradition, Las Noches de Las Luminarias. This VIP-level dinner welcomes nearly 250 guests in an area sequestered away from the evening's 2,400 other nightly visitors. Attendees enjoy an amazing outdoor dining experience, with hundreds of hand-lit luminaria bags casting a soft glow along the borders of the Steele Herb Garden and Center for Desert Living Trail. There are no speeches and no program, just the opportunity to revel in the uniquely Arizona winter weather and socialize with fellow Patrons Circle members prior to heading out to the garden's main trails to enjoy musicians, storytellers, twinkling trees and more than 7,000 hand-lit luminarias to get in the holiday spirit!"

— Marcos D. Voss, Former Assistant Director of Development,
Desert Botanical Garden, Phoenix, AZ.
Phone (480) 600-2219. E-mail: marcosdvoss@gmail.com.
Website: www.linkedin.com/in/marcosdvoss

Useful Assessment Tools for Member Engagement

Engaged members are enthusiastic members. They renew gladly and on time. They offer suggestions to enhance the member. They stick around.

Less engaged or “at-risk” members need more convincing. They may be missing out on services you’ve hand-created for them. You’ll lose them if you fail to demonstrate the value of membership.

“Retention is like sailing — constant adjustment to current conditions is the only way to get where you’re going,” says Amy Gitchell, marketing communications specialist for GrowthZone, an association management software company. GrowthZone offers reports and tools to help associations effectively measure member engagement. “It’s impossible to grow without monitoring statistics to stay on top of the evolution of membership,” Gitchell says. Below, she explains how monitoring member engagement can help you grow your association:

Why is it important to measure member engagement?

“Member engagement is the best indicator of potential churn. Consistently evaluating and benchmarking engagement provides the opportunity to reach at-risk members before they drop.”

Why is it imperative that organizations evaluate year-over-year retention rates?

“The member retention rate is critical to determining an organization’s loss rate. A decreasing retention rate typically means an increasing loss rate. If the trend continues, an organization will eventually cease to exist. Monitoring retention allows organizations to adjust their retention plan before disaster hits.”

What can be gained from knowing why a member joined or dropped?

“The ‘why’ is the secret to success. But the ‘why not’ is just as important. Surveying members once a year isn’t as effective as it used to be and often only brings in results from engaged members. Gathering data at the beginning of a member’s tenure helps organizations gauge and/or modify their plan to deliver strong membership ROI. The ‘why not’ data can be gathered in a member exit survey. It is potentially the most important information on which to focus, so as not to repeat mistakes.”

What member statistics best demonstrate engagement, or lack thereof?

“Retention rate, renewal rate, loss rate (churn) and average membership tenure are musts. Operating without those statistics is a recipe for disaster. Additionally, member acquisition cost and member lifetime value provide excellent data points for long-term planning.”

What designates a highly engaged member versus an at-risk member?

“Focus on what services are being utilized, as well as those that are not. Watch who is and isn’t opening your e-mails. Also, identify who is responding to your communication, logging in to the portal and using online registration. Silence may be golden in some situations, but in the world of membership, it’s a red flag.”

What are some signs that member communication could use improvement?

“Seeing a downward trend in e-mail open rates is one clue. If members indicate they weren’t aware of something, determine if it’s because they’re not reading your communication. Ask them how they want to be communicated with. Their responses may surprise you.”

Source: Amy Gitchell, Marketing Communications Specialist, GrowthZone. Phone (800) 825-9171, ext. 236. E-mail: amy.gitchell@growthzone.com. Website: www.growthzone.com

Choose Appropriate Gift Shop Merchandise

Careful thought and planning can pay big dividends when selecting merchandise for your organization’s actual and online gift shops. Even offices with limited square footage and storage space can be shopping destinations of choice when your members and their friends know they can find unique items and a full range of price points.

To choose appropriate gift shop items:

- **Concentrate on quality.** Whether it’s a ballpoint pen or a grandfather clock, purchase your stock as though you are providing a lifetime guarantee on everything you sell. Research the manufacturer and read consumer product reviews whenever possible. It may cost only pennies more to buy the best, particularly in quantity.
- **Shop the competition.** Visit gift shops in hospitals, zoos or theaters to peruse the selection. Look for markdowns that may indicate slow sales on those items. Ask staff which gifts sell out quickly, and determine if similar items would work for your store.
- **Choose appropriate items.** Gift shops are as personal as the organizations that operate them. Books on topics that fit your audience, games and puzzles, stationery sets, figurines and tableware can all be chosen to include themes like golf for country clubs, sea life for aquariums and great artists for museums.
- **Consider gifts made by members.** While not all shops lend themselves to selling handcrafted merchandise, you may have talented painters, quilters, woodcarvers and sculptors in your ranks. Have some firm guidelines on minimum and maximum price points you can reasonably sell (for an original painting, or a signed print) and offer a standard commission. Ability to produce popular items in quantity is important so you won’t disappoint happy customers who want more.
- **Offer incredible edibles.** Your gift shop should have a few quality food items, like imported fruit candy or chocolates, gourmet gift sets with local flavor and other nonperishables that will be hard to find elsewhere. When you find especially tasty delights, ask to be the exclusive area retailer.

Maximize Introductory Visits

How can you pull together a group of people — either existing or potential members or volunteers — outside of your immediate area? When charged with a task such as starting chapters or member advisory committees throughout your region or the nation, try these methods to recruit able-bodied members:

- Review your records to see who, from that community/region, is on your mailing list and may be familiar with your organization's work. Then, work through them to assemble a group of potential members for your arrival.
- Set appointments with officials who can introduce you around (e.g., local Chamber of Commerce, organization heads whose work has a connection to the work of your organization).
- Set up and publicize a public meeting or reception for people to learn more about your organization and their potential involvement in it.
- Offer to present a program to any civic organizations during your scheduled visit. Following your program, distribute a member sign-up form and literature about your organization.

Spoonfeed Member Rules

Does your organization have lots of membership rules and regulations? Consider spoonfeeding them to members one at a time.

Feature one rule in each issue of your member newsletter. Include a brief explanation that backs up the rule's justification and importance, helping members develop a solid understanding of all rules over time.

Networking Idea

- In conversations, ask open-ended questions rather than ones that garner simple yes or no answers. This opens up the discussion and shows you are interested in the other person. Additionally, responses may provide valuable membership-related clues.

Are Chapters Really Worth the Time, Effort?

It takes resources to run member chapters, but is the time and money paying off? In most cases, the parent association has this answer: "We don't know." That's because few organizations have a reliable method for determining the value of direct and indirect services that member chapters provide. Associations recognize that member chapters play a role in recruitment, marketing and advocacy, but it can be difficult to measure a chapter's worth based on these abstract concepts. Or, at least, it was, until Mariner Management and Marketing LLC got involved.

In 2017, the association management company launched their Chapter ROI Project by inviting association executives to contribute to a Chapter ROI Valuation Matrix. "The valuation matrix is a brainstorming exercise to collect a list of activities that could be monetized directly, as a service, based on volunteer hours or indirectly," says CEO Peter Houstle. "Everyone knows how much their chapter system costs, but they don't know how much it's worth." Houstle's team is changing the trend. Using a broad sampling of participants from the association world, they developed formulas that tie dollar amounts to those activities to help associations accurately measure their member chapters' ROI.

The first step to measuring a chapter's worth is identifying its individual revenue channels. Some sample chapter channels include:

- Distribution.
- Marketing and communication.
- Listening.
- Recruitment.
- Advocacy.
- Continuing education.
- Next gen development.
- Local resource.
- Product development.
- Member engagement.
- Leadership development.

Four valuation options can be used to create formulas that measure the worth of member chapter's services:

1. **Determine direct value.** The chapter activity produces direct income to the association (e.g., a rebate on the sale of a T-shirt).
2. **Price the service based on open market rates.** Most of the above services could be purchased by a private sector vendor. What money is being saved by using member chapters to provide this work instead?
3. **Price the volunteer contribution.** Estimate or track the hours put in by chapter volunteers to deliver these functions and assign an hourly rate that reflects what other professionals in the industry hold.
4. **Determine indirect value.** Assess the influence of chapter activity on mission or organization metrics such as certifications, memberships, registrations, etc.

Many project participants were pleased and surprised by their findings. After contributing to the Chapter ROI Valuation Matrix, the value of volunteer hours became much more apparent to Patrick Algyer, director of volunteer relations for Global Business Travel Association (GBTA). "We used simple numbers and applied data we already had available to discover that our volunteer contributions are worth more than \$2 million dollars," Algyer says. "Our 'boots on the ground' have a direct impact on the mission of our organization on a national level. After participating in the project, we see even more value in our member chapters, and now we can feel good about increasing our investments throughout."

Sources: Patrick Algyer, Director, Volunteer Relations, Global Business Travel Association. Phone (703) 684-0836. E-mail: palgyer@gbta.org. Website: www.gbta.org

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