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The Industry Partner Alliance (IPA) Committee is more than a guide for ASAE industry partners. It’s more than a group of companies and organizations that provide services and products to ASAE members. The IPA is a strong committee that listens and responds to the needs of the industry partner community.

Did you know that the IPA:

- Improves the membership experience and return on investment for industry partners.
- Works with ASAE and the ASAE Foundation on events and social responsibility programs.
- Delivers education sessions specifically targeted for industry partners at ASAE meetings.
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In today’s digital age, associations are increasingly relying on technology to support their missions and create value for their members. The 2017 Tech Toolkit can help you identify companies that can provide and implement the technology solutions you’re looking for. From digital marketing and event management to membership software and data-collection systems, these companies’ helpful tips can prepare you for your next strategy session.

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**Company Bio**

Abila is the leading provider of software and services to associations and nonprofits that help them improve decision making, execute with greater precision, increase engagement, and generate more revenue. Abila combines decades of industry insight with technology know-how to serve nearly 8,000 customers across North America.

Our customizable association management systems allow you to manage and engage members, as well as analyze and score these relationships for increased engagement. Abila partners with leading advocacy tools to help you connect membership data with messages and campaigns to inspire action and drive results.

**Key Association Trends to Embrace Now**

By Amanda Myers

Member expectations are constantly changing, as technology makes personalization of messaging and easy access to information more prevalent. Abila identified six trends currently affecting the association sector, along with actions association leaders can take to stay current and relevant.

1. **Education will become a focal point.** The importance of on-demand, online, and mobile learning options, as well as the value of professional certifications, will be on the rise. Educational offerings will be a big revenue generator for associations. **Action:** This is a great opportunity to reevaluate your approach to online learning, introduce relevant certifications and training, and explore purpose-built technologies, such as our Abila Freestone™ Learning Management System that can help you easily package and deliver content to increase member satisfaction, deepen engagement, and grow a budding revenue stream.

2. **Advocacy will emerge as a powerful tool.** As the political landscape changes in 2017, association leaders will see an opportunity to have their voices and perspectives heard. As political and regulatory agendas are shaped and defined, associations can engage members in important advocacy campaigns. **Action:** Given the new political leadership, identify key issues that could impact your organization and the sector you serve, then mobilize your member base. Abila partners with leading advocacy tools to help you connect membership data with messages and campaigns to inspire action and drive results.

3. **Integrations will be essential.** The free flow of data between software solutions continues to gain importance across associations of all sizes. A greater emphasis will be placed on application programming interfaces (APIs) and function-specific applications that work together seamlessly in a platform-driven ecosystem. **Action:** This is a great time to inventory your existing technology. Can you easily share important and relevant information...
between your systems to make your job more efficient and successful? Connect your products to help manage members and deliver online learning content, as well as manage finance, accounting, and HR needs on a seamless, scalable platform.

4. **National and chapter relations will be important.** Tighter collaboration between national chapters and component societies will facilitate a smoother, more consistent, and transparent member experience, creating a greater sense of value around membership. Organizations will look to technology to increase cooperation and the sharing of insights.

**Action:** National associations and their chapters should look for opportunities to partner on programs, membership, events, and online learning. The more seamless the members’ experience across local, regional, and national associations, the more engaged they’ll likely be.

5. **We’ll see a rise in foundations.** More and more, association leaders will look at establishing a 501(c)(3) charitable foundation to broaden the reach of their organization and invest in the future. We’ll see an acceleration of this in 2017, as organizations look for new revenue and engagement opportunities.

**Action:** Take a look at your revenue sources to determine if it makes sense for your organization to invest in a foundation. Foundations can help broaden the appeal and outreach of an association and its mission, and they can attract new sources of revenue.

6. **The “membership of things” will gain traction.** The consumerization of the association/member experience will have a tremendous impact on associations of all shapes and sizes, as members request more mobile, nimble, personalized, and efficient engagements, similar to the experiences they have with Amazon and Netflix.

**Action:** Uncover trends and behaviors to develop a broader, future-looking engagement strategy, with purpose-built technologies as the foundation. Understand how membership is interacting with your organization, and identify the most effective channels for sharing information and creating dialogue. Tools like Abila’s A-Score™ can help.
For any association, membership engagement is critical. It’s what creates the spark and helps associations attract and retain members.

However, a number of external factors, from technology to the economy, to an incoming tech-savvy millennial generation, have altered the way that associations approach membership engagement. Associations that wish to drive engagement and increase retention will need to adapt to these changing times in order to position themselves for success.

**Mobile first.** Millennials engage differently. As a tech-driven generation, they rely heavily on social networking and on mobile devices to stay connected and make decisions online. This means a mobile-first strategy is a must.

Associations that are prioritizing a mobile-inclusive approach—having mobile-friendly websites and content, plus mobile applications—will likely have more success in attracting, engaging, and retaining millennials. Be sure to always take advantage of available software and technology that allows you to create spaces for these members to connect, collaborate, and engage.

**Trust is currency.** Millennials want a level of trust and authenticity from the organizations they choose to be affiliated with. For them, trust, engagement, and relationships are largely built online.

Research conducted by Google found only 1 percent of millennials surveyed said that a compelling advertisement would make them trust a brand more and indicated that millennials view advertising as inauthentic. This means that trust is currency for this generation. But how do you build trust with a demographic that seems to be constantly evolving and endlessly elusive?

Reviews and relatable video content are two of the best ways to attract millennials, keep them engaged, and ulti-
mately build trust. It is important to make sure that positive reviews are reflected on your social media pages, accounts, and throughout the web. Honest, positive online reviews will benefit your association as you work toward engaging and building trust with this demographic. These reviews serve as an extension of your organization and can serve to influence perception.

Beyond reviews and reputation development, it is imperative to make sure your organization is producing relevant and relatable video content. Vlogging (video-blogging) and vlogger-style content are great ways to reach and build trust with millennials in an engaging, relatable, and authentic way.

**Personalization.** Engaging millennials requires adding value to their experience in personalized ways, including members-only access, recognition, personalized emails and profiles, and curated website content. Creating the impression that each member is special is an essential part of attracting and these members.

**Data, insights, and marketing automation.** Investing in marketing automation and other data-driven platforms will become increasingly important for associations looking to attract and engage millennials. Although these types of tools may sometimes require an upfront investment, the potential benefit of easily and consistently delivering relevant content, and also knowing how your audience is interacting with that content and what peaks their interest, can pay off in dividends.

Data-driven software and marketing automation will help your association pin-point and better understand the behaviors of your target audience. The new insights you uncover can open up new opportunities to drive engagement.

**Where’s the value?** Last but not least, millennials are not unique in that they want to see value when it comes to where they’re investing their time and money. Make sure you are communicating the value of your association membership clearly and consistently.

Whether the value of membership is networking, a unique experience, or being a part of something bigger and contributing to a great mission or cause, make sure you are communicating the value your organization has when trying to garner the attention of the millennial audience.
5 ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS TO ASK IN YOUR EVENT APP RFP

BY MICHAEL DOANE

Writing an RFP can be a daunting task, especially if you’re not tech savvy. Here are a few essential questions most meeting planners miss. Getting the answers to these questions gives you more power in choosing the vendor that’s right for your needs.

1. WILL I RECEIVE HELP IN BUILDING THE APP?
   Silly question, right? Not really when you consider that many app companies give you the tools to build your app but provide little assistance. Often, these companies offer their product at a lower cost but expect you to handle all aspects of design.
   
   Things to consider: Will you have a dedicated project manager? A users’ guide? Design support? Make sure you get a break down of exactly what they offer so you know what to expect.

2. IS THE APP NATIVE OR WEB-BASED?
   Most studies conclude that users prefer native apps versus web apps. Some attendees, however, may prefer to use a laptop, which won’t support native apps. The best-case scenario is an app that doesn’t limit users, providing options for both web and native.

3. HOW MUCH BANDWIDTH IS RECOMMENDED?
   At the bare minimum, a 10Mbps download speed and a 5Mbps upload speed per device is recommended (use a tool like SpeedTest to determine this). If your venue cannot promise these rates, make sure your attendees have access to a native app they’ve downloaded offsite.
   
   While your app company is not responsible for bad WiFi or low bandwidth, ask what they can do to help. Many vendors can provide onsite support to supplement tech questions your staff may receive.

COMPANY BIO

CadmiumCD is an event-technology company with more than 15 years of experience providing on-demand content management solutions that streamline the workflow for meeting planners, exhibition organizers, education directors, and attendees worldwide. The company’s software platform makes it easy to collect, manage, and share content to all event stakeholders through its modules: Call for Papers, Speaker & Exhibitor Data Management, Digital Content Publication, Audio Recordings, Digital Poster Galleries, Online Itinerary Planners, Interactive Floor Plans, Native Event Apps, and Postconference Evaluations. For more information, visit www.cadmiumcd.com
DOES THE EVENT APP INTEGRATE WITH OTHER TOOLS?

For the best experience, find an app backed by an event management system. Also find out if the app works with your association management software and registration tools.

What’s the associated cost for integrations? If you’re on a budget, does the app allow spreadsheet imports and exports?

It’s important to know how much control you have over your data. These questions are often forgotten when they should be an important part of the conversation.

WHAT TYPE OF DATA CAN YOU IMPORT/EXPORT?

Many organizations also need their apps to work with custom data like presentation numbers and CEU values. And they need this data to actually show up somewhere in the app.

Make a list of all the data you need to import and manage in your app. Think of what type of information you need to communicate to attendees. Make sure the app company you ultimately end up choosing meets all these criteria.

There may also be times when you need to export data from your app with certain variables in a specific spreadsheet column. Does your printing company need custom reports? Does your graphic designer need a list of exhibitor logos? Find out if you can easily export these types of data sets from your app.

Crafting the perfect RFP is a lot of work, but don’t fret. Good tech companies in the events industry consider themselves your partner, not just another vendor.

Ask the five questions above in all your RFPs and you’ll be able to quickly separate the wheat from the chaff.
WHY IT PAYS TO GIVE YOUR EXHIBITORS THE BEST TOOLS

BY JEFF COOPER

According to ASAE’s Operating Ratio Report, exhibit and tradeshow booth fees are the second-largest source of nondues revenue for both trade associations and individual membership organizations. This finding highlights how crucial exhibition revenue is to the success of most associations. Maintaining this revenue stream comes down to one important factor: exhibitor satisfaction. So I’ll ask you a question: How satisfied are your exhibitors?

EXHIBITOR SATISFACTION

If you’re not sure how to answer that question, I can offer you this piece of advice: The best way to satisfy your exhibitors is by helping them achieve their goals.

When companies decide to exhibit at your event, they do so with one goal in mind: acquiring leads. The number of leads they acquire, and their ability to follow up with those leads, will be the deciding factor for whether they consider the event a success. It will also determine whether or not they choose to exhibit at your event again.

This is why it is so important to offer your exhibitors quality lead retrieval solutions that are user-friendly and highly effective. You may be surprised to learn what an effect lead retrieval can have on exhibitor satisfaction.

LEAD RETRIEVAL SELECTION

Lead retrieval solutions vary widely and many do not offer all of the features exhibitors need.

You wouldn’t use a plastic Fisher-Price fishing pole to capture a marlin, right? The same is true with lead retrieval—you would not use a sub-par lead retrieval device to capture an important client. The fact is there are lead retrieval solutions that are up to the task and others which are not.
So when selecting a lead retrieval provider, be sure and look for these features:

1. **Qualifiers**
   Does the lead retrieval device offer standard and custom qualifiers? Most exhibitors want to record whether a lead is a hot prospect or someone to call immediately. These are just two examples of standard qualifiers. If the lead retrieval solution is sophisticated, exhibitors will also be able to add custom qualifiers to fit their business needs.

2. **Notes**
   The ability to take notes on a lead record is crucial for exhibitors. Good lead retrieval solutions will allow exhibitors to type or even dictate notes.

3. **CRM Integration**
   Exhibitors want to take the valuable information they’ve captured and upload it into their CRM system for easy follow-up and tracking. If the lead retrieval solution you offer doesn’t provide this option, then you are likely frustrating your exhibitors.

**BUYER BEWARE**
Many mobile event apps offer lead retrieval, but this feature is often an afterthought. Event apps have a very basic contact acquisition component without the advanced features outlined above. You owe it to your exhibitors to provide the best solutions that meet their specific needs. If you give them an afterthought lead retrieval solution, your event might become an afterthought for them, too.

Taking the time to select a quality lead retrieval provider for your exhibitors will pay off in the end. The better their experience, the more likely they will return next year. Exhibitors spend big money to participate in your event and having an effective tool to do their job will be much appreciated.
BUILDING THE ASSOCIATION OF THE FUTURE

BY PAUL LUNDY

The term “innovative” has been touted as an aspirational quality for corporations and associations alike—each industry scrambling to be the next Uber. Or at the very least, to remain relevant and profitable. Virtual reality devices are flooding the market, along with artificial intelligence, predictive analytics, even hover boards. But what is in store for the association of the future?

Industry experts have been discussing the race for relevance and the dynamic changes required for associations to avoid extinction. But some of the most successful for-profit companies are adopting the same benefits associations provide for their members—think Hubspot’s inbound.org collaborative community, Salesforce’s 1-1-1 mission statement, and Google’s academic research on environmental sustainability. This proves that association-provided benefits—networking, a mission-driven culture, and academic research—are just as relevant as they’ve always been. If associations adopt just one aspect of the for-profit world, they can plant firm roots and flourish amongst the innovators.

BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE DRIVES INNOVATION

Without measurable objectives, it’s easy for an organization to imagine it is performing well overall. But without insights into all aspects of your business, you may be missing out on important, timely developments. Clarity around organizational objectives is the key to transforming your association’s mission and passion into real, measurable outcomes.

Reliable business intelligence will:

• ensure your business processes are efficient
• identify areas of improvement
• empower staff with clear objectives
• create a culture of progress

The challenge for associations is that real-time data requires robust technology and diligent data management. It requires a commitment to ensuring that you’re basing business decisions on reliable, real-time information. After
all, you can’t have artificial intelligence without BI.

Your organization needs a business intelligence solution that is:

**Dynamic.** Your data is always changing. Your BI solution should allow you to view the health of your organization in real time, rather than a snapshot of the past. The days of working with spreadsheets have passed.

**Visual.** Modern BI solutions allow you to spot trends and outliers to uncover and share information visually.

**Accessible.** Data governance is important, but everyone in your organization needs to know the status of their efforts to support your mission. That type of access is just impossible in a spreadsheet or legacy database.

**Empowering.** User adoption isn’t just about ensuring that your staff uses the appropriate tool to complete tasks; it’s about empowering them to ask and answer their own business questions.

**Diverse.** A modern BI tool can report on data through integrations. There is no single piece of software that will meet everyone’s needs, but there should be one source for reports and dashboards.

**Mobile.** Advances in mobile technology have changed the way we do business, as well as where we do business. Your BI tool should work anywhere, on any device.

**Actionable.** However your organization chooses to be proactive, your reporting tool should make decision-making as effortless as possible and save time and effort.

**THE ASSOCIATION OF THE FUTURE IS MISSION DRIVEN AND DATA INFORMED**

It’s easy to talk about the future and the trendiest technology, but we need to focus on driving the right actions to support our objectives and mission. As organizations move to meet the needs of their members and to answer difficult questions about the future, they must adopt tools that are agile, dynamic, and future-ready—tools that empower staff to understand and make a difference in the organization. You need a BI solution that will help you to make sound decisions.
GEARING UP FOR GROWTH IN 2017

BY SUZANNE CARAWAN

The association industry is in the midst of a massive evolution that is termed “digital transformation.” Associations are quickly moving to adopt a digital-first strategy to lower costs and increase their return on marketing investments. To do so, associations need to accept five fundamental premises of digital:

1. Today’s user is smart and turns to the internet first to research solutions to current challenges.

2. Today’s user makes 70 percent of his or her purchasing decisions through online research without ever talking to someone at your organization.

3. Today’s user has an attention span of less than four seconds and seeks an interactive digital experience.

4. Today’s user has many choices, and the onus is on the association to differentiate itself from competitors by offering a compelling value proposition, conveyed by answering the user’s question of “what’s in it for me?”

5. Digital is the preferred method of communication, as each touchpoint can be tracked, measured, and analyzed at the lowest possible cost.

Associations commonly cite two areas in which they need to improve in 2017:

- Gain new insight into their current members to increase the level of personalization that the association can provide
- Grow new revenue through attracting and converting previously unknown users into customers

To meet these goals, associations are investing in new software platforms—called marketing automation—that can better gather, track, and provide metrics on how each...
individual behaves on your digital properties. For the majority of associations, digital properties include your website, email, social media, videos, mobile app, surveys, forms, and blogs. Associations are looking to utilize their original content to better engage individuals and lead them down a specific journey that typically leads to purchasing a product or service.

Marketing automation software platforms are the number-one area of new association investment in 2017 largely because they finally shed light into the black box that has long been digital marketing. Associations are able to utilize the platform and instantly understand which user is on a particularly important page of their website and then send personalized communications in real time to encourage the user to complete a specific sequence of steps. Instead of trying to understand which user is likely to register for the annual conference based on open and click rates, marketing automation focuses on understanding the total effect of an individual’s behavior to assess where the user is in his or her personal-buying cycle.

Lead scoring, or the methodology of putting a numerical index score against behaviors to weigh some behaviors as more indicative of purchase than others, is one of the features that is routinely found in marketing automation platforms. The association can assign a point value for specific activities, such as opening an email, filling out a form, or visiting an important web page. Then the association can add these individual activities into one overall score, which enables it to easily identify the set of candidates that are the most likely to make the purchase based on their actual behavior.

For example, the Plastics Industry Association undertook a digital transformation strategy that included adding a marketing automation platform, integrated to its association management system—moving it into a world of closed-loop marketing whereby they had total insight into how people used their content, what prompted them to buy, and how long it took them to buy. Staff time is now spent analyzing results and responsively changing content, instead of building and sending emails. Marketing automation is increasing the agility of Plastics to service its constituents with relevant content in a far more personalized manner.
DATA-DRIVEN MEMBERSHIP MANAGEMENT BOOSTS ENGAGEMENT

BY PATRICK DORSEY

Why is it difficult for associations to drive relevant engagements and communicate their unique value to members and prospective members? The answer starts with how associations manage their ever-increasing amounts of internal and external data.

Many associations don’t take advantage of their data because they are hindered by siloed departments, undefined processes, an inflexible membership management database, or minimal fusion of the internal (e.g., demographics) and external data (e.g., learning management system or online community).

If associations want to recognize the inherent, yet untapped, benefits of their data to increase engagement with members, they should begin with the following three steps:

STEP 1: CREATE A PANORAMIC VIEW OF THE MEMBER
To effectively engage with members and prospects, associations must understand and know their members. Successful associations leverage the new era of membership management platforms with built-in data management tools, as well as data analytics and visualizations to blend and analyze valuable member data to create a panoramic view of their members.

This panoramic view helps associations understand behaviors, motivations, and goals, as well as members’ challenges. With this deeper understanding, associations can better segment their database, identify appropriate communication channels, deliver engaging content, and create new opportunities for interaction.

STEP 2: CREATE CONTENT TO ADDRESS MEMBER NEEDS AND DESIRES
Associations focused on member engagement should also be hyper-focused on creating and delivering value for their

COMPANY BIO
Impexium believes AMS technology is no longer simply a productivity tool to perform tasks faster and cheaper, but should transform the way an association conducts business. Managing the business of your association should be simple and intuitive, allowing staff and members to work with the latest technology and conveniences expected from the for-profit sector.

Impexium’s mobile-first, fully responsive, analytics-driven membership management platform allows associations of all sizes to:

• Serve members more intelligently and profitably
• Strengthen alignment between strategies and operations
• Reduce costs through increased flexibility and gain ROI faster
• Create value for members, prospects, and staff
members. Delivering value is dependent on the ability to successfully understand and address each member’s specific behavior, needs, and desires (i.e., the panoramic view). Generating relevant content, like blogs, videos, infographics, webinars, research papers, and continuing-education options is one way to deliver value to current or prospective members.

By examining how, when, and where members consume content, associations learn what is important to their membership and, more importantly, what types of content generate desired success metrics and outcomes. The result is straightforward: the consistent delivery of relevant content and messages can resonate with members and become the foundation for successful, ongoing engagement strategies.

STEP 3: ANALYZE AND VISUALIZE THE DATA
Trying to identify the right campaigns and tactics to increase member engagement isn’t new. But now, associations can approach it differently with the help of intuitive and cost-effective analytics tools.

Leveraging a membership management platform with a suite of interactive dashboards and visualization tools is a requirement for today’s forward-thinking executives. The ability to quickly analyze data from multiple internal and external data sources provides instant feedback on how to improve the member’s experience. Data visualizations make it easier to examine the effectiveness of current strategies and uncover the insights needed to drive value to members via programs, content, and personalized services.

WHERE DO ASSOCIATIONS GO FROM HERE?
Executing and optimizing these steps requires commitment, patience, and a dose of creativity. Nevertheless, associations have a unique advantage. By joining an association, members have implicitly expressed a desire for personalized experiences. And by instilling a data-driven approach to membership management, associations can capitalize on this desire.

A cohesive approach to data collection, management, and analysis allows associations to better understand their members’ behaviors and uncover the valuable insight needed to develop and execute more effective engagement strategies.
DATA CENTRALIZATION: SWEAT THE SMALL STUFF

BY JON DANFORTH, CAE

All organizations face the challenge of centralizing their software systems and the data those systems manage. While a great deal of time and money is spent on setting up various software applications to function as desired, often they are integrated through the use of web services. It can be an enormous challenge to then bring the data together from these various sources into a centralized data system. Even the most sophisticated integrations can overlook critical, smaller tools used by the association, thus negating the benefit of data centralization. When it comes to comprehensive and centralized data, you have to sweat the small stuff.

The association’s association management system is typically the primary repository of key membership and financial transaction data, yet virtually all associations utilize additional third-party systems for activities, such as event registrations, exhibitor sales, certification and continuing education, community engagement, surveys, and bulk emailing, to name a few.

Once these systems are in place, the most important outcome should be centralizing the data from these various systems into one comprehensive resource. Most often, the AMS is used to house all of this data, as it is usually the most complex of the systems and should be extendable in order to do so. The systems used in addition to the AMS typically build additional data, based on the population of members and constituents already known to the association, and thus are records in the AMS, making it the ideal choice to then append the additional data from the external systems to those records.

Associations that successfully leverage their software systems in this way reap the benefits of knowing the full extent of participation of each constituent and can perform advanced data analytics, develop targeted communities to drive engagement, and target communications for use in marketing and bulk emailing.

Naturally, every association wants this as an end result.
While the cost of doing so—both in staff time and in software purchasing and development—is often the biggest hurdle, the most important key to being successful is to utilize a holistic approach to technology.

Wes Trochlil, president of Effective Database Management, puts it this way: “Any technology, big or small, needs to be considered for how it fits into the broader ecosystem of the association.” While a lot of attention is paid to larger integrations, especially those that process financial transactions, such as outsourced meeting registrations or job boards, not enough attention is paid to smaller tools, such as surveys, bulk emailing, or external community engagement, because they are often inexpensive and easy to add.

Often, the data gathered in these types of systems is very meaningful to the organization but is housed separately in those systems. Associations must consider the broader impact of all the technology that they use. Otherwise they will end up with a bunch of silos of meaningful data, rather than having it centralized for the maximum benefit.

Dean Millard, vice president of technology and administration at the American Chiropractic Association, says, “Our association recognizes that technology and data integration must be a part of the strategic planning of the organization.” This includes all software systems they utilize across the entire association.

Technology has become a major part of the strategic planning process, but that has to include a holistic approach to all software tools, no matter how small or easy it is to use. If the tool is important, then the data it creates is important, too, and needs to be integrated back into the centralized AMS system.
You’re in the center of the field. The crowd is in a frenzy. Everything slows down to a moment. There is only one obstacle in your path to glory. As the goalie sways back and forth in a hypnotic dance, you’re faced with the most important decision of your career. Which way will the ball go?

It never ceases to amaze me how often people don’t go with the obvious choice—the choice that makes the most sense for their organization. In the world of penalty kicks, statistics tells us that going straight down the middle is by far the best option. However, it is the path least traveled. Why? More importantly, are there lessons to be learned in making good technology decisions for your organization?

I have watched many organizations stand in front of the “goalie,” so to speak, at a critical time in their journey and over-think it. They stray from past experience, and what they know is the right direction. Often, they end up opting for the complex solution versus the simple. Ultimately, it can be catastrophic in some cases. I think in some small way this type of thinking has to do with giving it “the old college try.” If we are going to fail, we are going to fail trying something other than the middle. This is true in particular with organizations managed by overly active boards. Does any of this sound familiar to you?

Keeping it simple and focusing on the actual goal when making technology decisions is so important. In today’s world of software providers, who try to solve all user problems, the lure to overextend is great. So, how can organizations stare down tough decisions and make the right choice? By adhering to some basic rules, today’s association leaders can create a strong path to success.

Know the goal. Eli Goldratt wrote a book about staying focused on the goal of the organization. This sounds simple, but in so many cases, the goal gets lost in the process. Along
the way, features, functionality, and personal agendas take over. Be relentless. Ensure everyone is focused on the goal and the driver for the technology choice is in front of you.

**Be exhaustively collaborative and inclusive.** If you want to ensure success, you better make sure you have all your inputs from people. Without inputs, you could make a great strategic decision that fails operationally.

**Be extremely focused.** You are making this decision for a reason, so don’t stray from the mission. Also, don’t give it “the old college try” unnecessarily. It will end poorly.

**Maintain transparency.** Throughout the process, share your burden and give others the opportunity to share their burdens, too. Ensure that the board is fully in the loop.

At the end of the day, and regardless of the size of the organization, when we, as leaders, are faced with important crossroads in our journey, we should all call a timeout to think about our decision. Kicking the ball down the middle can make a huge difference in the direction of an organization.

Finally, Henry David Thoreau once said, “Simplify, simplify, simplify.” While Thoreau’s intentions were to give up all worldly possessions and live a simple life, his words still ring true for today’s association leaders. Don’t over think it, go with your gut, and kick the ball down the middle. More often than not, you will end up in the roaring thunder of success. Or at the very least, with a pat on the back from the staff and board for a job well done.
HOW CAN YOUR ASSOCIATION BETTER ENGAGE WITH MILLENNIALS?

BY AUDREY SMILGYS

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015 marked the first year millennials became the largest segment of the U.S. workforce at 36 percent. By 2020, they are projected to reach 43 percent. As more millennials enter the workforce, associations will struggle to survive because, unlike previous generations, millennials are not joiners.

For the baby boomer generation, joining associations was expected in order to further education or meet face-to-face with peers. But for the internet-savvy millennials, the first instinct for finding information is to search on Google or YouTube. And, they typically don’t choose in-person meetings when an online option is available. To survive into the future, associations need to revamp their member services to meet the habits and preferences favored by millennials.

Here are two ways your association can better engage with millennials:

CREATE THE AMAZON EXPERIENCE

From Netflix to Uber, millennials expect to hit a button and get exactly what they want. They’ve grown up in the era of instant gratification and expect it to extend to all parts of their lives. Therefore, having to manually fill out and mail in a membership application seems too “old school” to them. They want the Amazon experience—easy, instant access to everything they need from an association, all in one place online.

The key to delivering this experience is creating a self-service website that gives your members the ability to complete multiple tasks on their own. By connecting your website with a centralized membership database and the e-commerce functionality within your association manage-
ment system, you can easily create this environment. In a few keystrokes, members can join your association and update their member profile, as well as renew membership and purchase products. The result is a win-win—millennials get the Amazon experience they know and love, and your association gains new members.

**PROVIDE A SEAMLESS EXPERIENCE ACROSS DEVICES**

Millennials are used to working across multiple devices. A file they upload to Google Drive or Dropbox on their work computer is instantly accessible to them on their smartphone or tablet on the commute home. They expect your association to provide the same seamless online experience if they join. Therefore, you need to make sure your association’s website has a responsive design that not only looks consistent and appealing on all devices, but also provides the same self-service functions.

Most importantly, data needs to flow in real time between devices, allowing members to make updates to their profiles anytime, anywhere. A cloud AMS is essential to providing this experience. Since all member data is stored in a centralized database in the cloud, a member can make a profile update on his or her smartphone, and it will be reflected on the desktop site in real time. And vice versa—if they make a change on their work computer, it will update on the mobile site in real time as well.

As millennials continue to take over the workforce and baby boomers and Gen Xers head toward retirement, it will be more important than ever for associations to understand and adapt to their members. To learn more ways you can encourage the next generation of professionals to join your association, download the tip sheet, “How to Make Your Association More Appealing to Millennials,” from our website.
Content is now critical for associations as they aim to capture the attention of busy professionals and keep them engaged and informed. Content marketing has become common vernacular for marketers, and associations by nature have great content and resources to share. Done effectively, content marketing drives deeper engagement with current and prospective members and builds industry leadership.

Quality content, however, demands a commitment of time and resources, and at the end of the day, leaders are looking for a return on that investment. Start by focusing your goals and aligning them with your organization’s priorities, then ensure your content is delivering on its desired outcome.

Here are five essential elements of producing, delivering, and promoting valuable content:

1. **Target your audience’s needs.** The first step to creating an effective content marketing strategy is being clear on your audience’s challenges. What unique insights, tips, and data can your organization provide to solve their problems? Also, what channels are most effective in reaching that group? Segmenting content, as well as its distribution channels (blogs, social media, newsletters), by audience group allows you the opportunity to truly optimize performance by closely monitoring engagement and revising the strategy if needed.

2. **Be authentic.** It’s no secret that people want honest and practical content. While your end goal is promoting your organization’s thought leadership, you risk credibility if you’re serving up content that isn’t reliably independent. Similarly, it must remain true to your association’s voice. Authentic storytelling can be the best way to grab and keep your audience’s attention.
3 Stay consistent. A content strategy requires a true commitment. While it needs to be authentic, it also needs to serve as a regular touchpoint that reinforces your organization’s unique value proposition. According to Forrester, creating a consistent experience across all of your brand touchpoints is a significant driver of trust. And once you’ve started to implement your strategy, delivering consistent content is essential to staying top-of-mind and reinforcing your brand and industry position.

4 Integrate. It’s not enough to write a blog post, put it online, and hope that someone stumbles upon it. Integration is key. Your original content—including blog posts, white papers, and webinars—can live on and have a greater impact if incorporated into various distribution channels. For example, break down a white paper into shorter blog posts and turn its data points into an infographic. Get the most out of your content, but ensure it is reaching its target audience.

5 Test and retest. The beauty of digital media is the ability to have on-demand access to data. You can closely monitor the kind of content and stories driving traffic and engagement. In the business-to-business world, email still remains the most commonly used tool for distribution. As we’ve seen in our ongoing research, the average professional relies on email for their most important, need-to-know news and information. According to the Content Marketing Institute’s 2017 benchmark and trends report, 93 percent of marketers will also continue to use email as the most important vehicle for their content. Email, social media, and other digital channels provide an immediate way to test engagement and help you quickly revise your strategy.

Associations that take time to strategize on the right match of content and distribution are better able to reach audiences in an engaging manner. Understand your audience and how they prefer to consume information, then tailor your goals and strategies to make the most of the resources you put toward your marketing efforts. Also, leverage your marketing partners for their insights, help, and distribution to ensure your content is both valued and trusted.
Staying competitive and relevant in today’s digital world requires innovative ways to engage your members. And to operate efficiently, you need to implement an easy-to-use, safe, and secure technology through a connected platform. Doing this saves you and your staff time, leverages your membership data for better engagement, and reduces your costs by not having to work with multiple vendors.

Here are several strategies which leverage modern technology to help you connect with your membership:

MODERN WEBSITE DESIGN
You’re challenged with attracting and engaging members with a compelling experience. Adding to it, reportedly, the human attention span averages eight seconds. Is your website design keeping your members’ attention for more than eight seconds?

To best accomplish your goals, adopt a rule where simplicity meets design. Here are some ways to do this:

- Deliver a modern visual design branded to your association.
- Utilize a user design to create an intuitive member experience.
- Implement a site navigation to make it easy to explore.
- Display strong calls to action to keep them engaged.

MOBILE RESPONSIVE WEBSITE
Think about how your members engage with websites like Amazon and Netflix. How often do they use mobile devices? A lot. According to hostingfacts.com, 75 percent of U.S.-based website users are arriving to your site through a mobile device. Your members have developed expectations...
from this browsing experience. For you to deliver on this, your association site must be mobile responsive.

A mobile responsive website automatically and intuitively changes how your site is displayed on any device your members view it. The content and layout adapt to the screen on which it’s shown, whether a mobile phone or tablet. If you build your website on a platform to support mobile browsing, your association automatically supports your members.

**SOCIAL COMMUNITY**

Today’s modern members engage using many social media platforms in all aspects of their daily life. To strengthen your organization’s connection with its members, consider building a social community within your member portal. Not only does it make it easier for your members to engage with one another and your association, it also serves as a revenue opportunity, if you choose to offer online advertising and job-posting services to vendor partners.

**MOBILE SOCIAL APP**

How often do you check your smart phone for the latest news? Connecting your members with each other and to your organization through a mobile app keeps your organization top of mind. And it delivers the modern experience members expect. With the touch of a button on their mobile device, members are notified of upcoming events and hot job opportunities, and they can connect with committees and groups within your organization.

It’s an interconnected world. If a legacy website and disconnected solutions represent your association today, know it’s time to move forward as your members explore daily life through mobile applications and smart devices. They crave timely, exceptional digital experiences. And they expect your organization to offer them a connected experience across all of your applications and all of their devices.

It’s time to make the move toward a mobile-responsive, modern-designed website and deliver all of your value to members on all of their digital devices. Isn’t it time you modernized your association?