



Association Apocalypse

Navigating the Rapidly Changing Landscape
to Ensure Future Success

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Belinda Moore has assisted thousands of not-for-profit organisations with their strategic and membership challenges. She specialises in training, motivating and up-skilling boards, staff, and volunteers to improve performance and outcomes.



Known for her enthusiastic and engaging style, Belinda is a frequent presenter for not-for-profit organisations around the world and can speak knowledgeably on an array of topics relating to association strategy, business models, and membership.

Revealing insights from her personal and professional experiences, she ensures that participants walk away with practical ideas and information they can immediately apply.

Belinda has written three books: *The Membership Machine*, *Membership Fundamentals*, *The Membership Managers' Handbook*. She authored the white paper *Membership is Dead?* and writes the popular *Association Annie* comic strips. Her first *Association Annie* comic book, *Herding Cats*, will be available in late 2019.

Together with her partner, Julian Moore, she has run Strategic Membership Solutions for the past 12 years. SMS is a consultancy dedicated to assisting associations to transition to the new operating landscape in a variety of ways including:

- Board and Staff Briefings
- Strategic Planning Facilitation
- Membership Strategy Development
- Sponsorship and Partnership Strategy Development
- Sponsorship Coaching Programs
- Membership Coaching Programs
- Leadership Coaching
- And more.

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INTRODUCTION



When I first started working in associations 25 years ago franking machines were common in offices, my CEO thought websites were a “passing fad”, Google didn’t exist, membership fees were paid by cheque, cameras needed film, dial up modems made a loud noise, and I was genuinely excited when our office bought a new fax machine.

It was only 15 years ago that MySpace was popular, (Facebook wasn’t public until 2006), social media was unknown, Blackberry phones dominated, digital cameras were cool, and I thought it was awesome that so many more members were paying by credit card.

It was only 10 years ago that the iPhone started to change the way we interact with the world, Twitter rose to popularity, and our daily lives started to become inextricably entwined with the internet.

The change since then has been phenomenal with the last 5 years seeing the rapid rise in the sharing economy and the apps that enable them (such as Spotify and Airbnb). The ability to outsource various tasks in our lives has become easier through the rapid rise of apps such as UBER, Deliveroo, Airtasker and Fiverr.

Things have changed dramatically, and we can expect to see exponentially more change moving forward.

This has massive implications for the association sector.

The Operating Landscape of Associations Is Undergoing a Seismic Shift

Without immediate and rapid action some associations will find themselves rendered obsolete and replaced by newer, more adaptable competitors. For those organisations that don’t adapt quickly, the coming changes represent an apocalypse they will not be able to navigate.

For associations with the will to move forward, grasping new technologies and opportunities, it will be a chance to transform into something more powerful than ever before as they navigate the following five shifts:

Technological - The integration of machine-thinking and AI into association management software will make the mass personalisation of membership possible. The first associations to successfully implement this will be able to rapidly expand their scope of influence and gain a potentially unassailable position in their industry or profession.

Generational - Associations need to bridge an ever-widening generational divide. They must be able to pivot enough to create an organisation that younger people want to join and/or engage with in sometimes new ways, while also retaining (and not alienating) existing members.

Competition, Mergers and Consolidations - An influx of new and powerful competitors will disrupt the existing competitive landscape. Associations must deal with these new competitors, as well as the existing range of competitors. They will also need to navigate the impact of mergers and consolidations between associations and amongst the members of their associations.

Tangibility - People are looking to engage with organisations who can deliver results not rhetoric. Associations must develop measurements of success around productive outcomes (not membership numbers) and be able to demonstrate the tangible difference they make.

Personalisation - In the highly personalised nature of the services we experience in our daily life has created the expectation of customisation amongst members. Associations cannot afford not to meet these baseline expectations which makes the need for associations to segment and personalise their offer and communications to target different groups more vital than ever before.

Community – People are driven by the need to belong and connect. Associations who can harness this desire and become the facilitators of positive connections amongst their community and tribes will have created a powerful competitive advantage for themselves.

Associations will need to fundamentally transform to survive

Associations cannot rely on business models suited for an era that has now passed. Innovation and entrepreneurship must be embedded operationally as associations fundamentally transform their:

Business Models

Associations will move away from purely relying on the “provider of services” model to become a platform that facilitates positive outcomes for members as well as the professional or industry community. This will create a range of new revenue generation opportunities.

Membership Structures

Associations will adopt more intuitive membership structures, fee schedules, and payment methods that better align with new business models and changes to the way people live and work.

Component Frameworks

Most association components (such as branches, special interest groups, committees) are based on traditional frameworks that limit the associations ability to powerfully mobilise their communities. Associations will better leverage the power of their communities by moving to more innovative models that enable members to connect and engage without requiring the hands-on involvement of association staff.

Any strategy will only be successful if strong operational enablers are in place

You cannot build a tall building without ensuring it has strong foundations that will support the final structure. In the same way, associations cannot grow effectively without the 11 core operational enablers in place:

1. **Leadership** - A dynamic, cohesive leadership team, comprising the Board, the CEO and any senior staff, who have a clear vision of the future, the pathway to get there, and the motivation to achieve it.
2. **Governance** – A well-run, supportive Board that has up-to-date and sound governance in place, and that embraces innovation, “nimbleness” and strategic oversight.
3. **Strategy** – Evidence-based strategic planning processes that create measurable, time-dependent objectives that flow throughout the association as operational KPIs. Effective monitoring and reporting against the strategy that feeds into the ongoing strategy refinement process.
4. **Staff** - A healthy, passionate, outcomes-focused, collaborative workplace that does not tolerate toxic staff members.

5. **Financial** – Strong, diversified income streams; revenue growth higher than inflation, pro-active minimisation of inefficiencies (e.g. automation of manual tasks); and effective financial management.
6. **Processes** – Strong yet flexible policies and procedures embedded into a robust technological framework.
7. **Technology** – Technology that optimises the ability of the association to facilitate powerful outcomes for all members of its community
8. **Offer** – A variety of powerful offers that deliver tangible value and meaningful outcomes for each market segment.
9. **Brand** - An engaging positioning and branding strategy that ensures the association is positioning itself in the hearts and minds of stakeholders in a compelling way.
10. **Communications** – Engaging and targeted internal and external communications that ensure they cut through the clutter and have their voice clearly heard.
11. **Engagement** - Proactive facilitation of positive interactions and engagement between individuals within the association community.

Change needs to begin now

The operating landscape for associations is changing so dramatically that associations need to fundamentally transform to survive. This kind of change cannot happen overnight, and associations must begin work now.

This whitepaper has been designed to assist association leaders to understand the scale of the change coming and create a platform for productive discussions within their associations about appropriate pathways forward.

By working together with other associations to resolve these challenges, associations can ensure the strength and vitality of their organisations into the future.

Warm regards,

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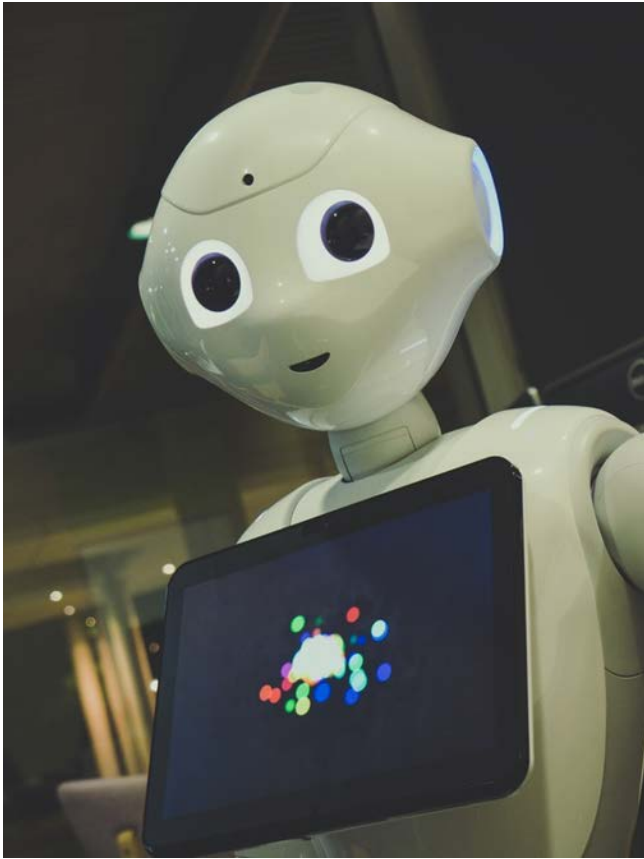
PS - Want to discuss this paper with myself and a small group of senior association leaders? I will be workshopping the issues in this paper at the *Winter Association Leaders Retreat* in Darwin (25-27 July 2019) and the *Summer Association Leaders Retreat* in Freycinet, Tasmania (25-27 November 2019). Register at www.answers.net.au if you would like to join us.

THE OPERATING LANDSCAPE OF ASSOCIATIONS IS UNDERGOING A SEISMIC SHIFT

The operating landscape of associations are completely transforming. Without immediate and rapid action some associations will find themselves rendered obsolete and replaced by newer, more adaptable competitors. For those organisations, the coming changes represent an apocalypse they cannot navigate. For other associations it will be an opportunity to transform into something more powerful than ever before. There are a huge number of changes occurring but the following five will have the most impact on associations: technological, competitive, tangibility, tribalisation and personalisation. This section discusses each of these changes in more detail.



TECHNOLOGICAL



The integration of machine-thinking and artificial intelligence into association software will force massive change in all associations.

The integration of machine-thinking and AI into association management software will make the mass personalisation of membership possible. The first associations to successfully implement will be able to rapidly expand their scope of influence and gain a potentially unassailable position in their industry or profession.

Great software is essential to a well-run association and, implemented effectively, it can:

- Allow collaboration across the organisation;
- Enhance the member experience;
- Reduce overheads;
- Provide data and insights that usefully inform the association's planning and decision-making processes;
- Streamline the association's operations to create efficiencies; and
- Connect all elements of even the most complex associations together to ensure a coordinated and integrated approach to servicing members and achieving organisational goals.

As compelling as they are, these benefits pale into insignificance when you consider what is coming next.

Emerging technologies will force transformational change on all associations as they will massively expand the association's ability to automatically generate highly tailored outcomes to each member.

The integration of machine-thinking and artificial intelligence into software is already something many software vendors have in development.

These new and innovative technologies will enable associations to achieve outcomes beyond those we can fully comprehend right now. Consider the following scenario ...

Imagine that your membership software tracks the emails your members open, what subject lines work best, what links they click, what time they open emails, how long they spend reading, what ads they look at, what they buy, what events they attend, how they rate those events, and every other interaction they have with you – whether online, offline or via a related party.

Now your software combines that data with all the other data your organisation holds on each member (e.g. education level, where they live, their age, interests).

Your software knows when to send emails to maximise opening potential, the subject lines most likely to generate a response, and the incentives most likely to excite each individual member in a personalised way.

The software writes your communications, without the input of staff, making an infinite amount of personalisation easily achievable and all in real time,

ensuring members get their information promptly and how they want it, every time.

Beyond that, your software cross-references the data it holds against similar members and predicts the products and services each of your members want – before they even realise themselves.

Imagine your members connecting directly with each other in real time to find solutions to their problems.

The kind of software could enable the association to tap into previously difficult or inaccessible opportunities such as the ability to crowd fund for projects and facilitate member community driven programs.

It will enable associations to immediately analyse and apply insights to enhance the individual members' experience. Existing membership categories will become obsolete as each member receives a solution directly tailored to their needs, desires, actions, and reactions.

As the increasing affordability of these solutions leads to widespread uptake amongst associations, it will create a massive impetus for fundamental changes to the way associations operate.

Pricing and business models will change. The organisational chart of associations will completely transform. These new technologies will affect every function of every association.

Associations who successfully adopt these new technologies will have an almost unassailable competitive advantage.

The appeal of these innovative technologies is undeniable and, as they become affordable, take-up by the sector will be swift. New software competitors will emerge, taking the market with them.

The successful implementation of this technology will provide associations with the ability to rapidly expand into related or new markets they may not have ventured into previously.

A major challenge for early adopters will be the development and implementation of the technology itself, which will require significant planning and resourcing.

Associations are hampered by a lack of technological expertise

Many associations are hampered by a lack of knowledge about technology. This isn't surprising as even the basic acronyms can be confusing with many people still not understanding the difference between a CRM (Customer Relationship Management), a CMS (Content management System), and an AMS (Association Management System).

To be able to make informed decisions about the right technology association board must increase their skills and knowledge in this area to avoid selecting an option (such as WordPress) because it is cheap and easy to understand, rather than the best option.

The speed and willingness of association-specific software vendors limits the ability of associations to adapt

There are many well-intentioned software vendors and a wide range of association management options available. Unfortunately, many of the current options were designed to suit traditional association business models and most will not easily support the business models outlined further in this paper.

Despite many associations attempting to provide vendors with insights that will enable them to adapt their technology to the current and future needs of associations, this feedback is often regarded as an annoyance or an "issue specific to that association".

As a result, the range of association software options does not currently provide associations with a wide variety of compelling options for the future. Watch for new start-ups or reinvigorated existing vendors stepping into this space.

Associations must become adept at finding and implementing technological solutions.

Traditionally, associations have been slow to adapt to technological innovation. To survive into the future associations must become technological innovators. Rather than being a passive customer in the technology selection process, associations must proactively exert influence over software vendors to ensure they are adopting the right solutions.

Associations must ensure their needs analysis considers every function of the association including governance, community engagement, staffing, finance, events, communications, advocacy, policy, and publications.

As more associations prioritise the need to be at the forefront of technological change, it is likely non-competitive associations will start working together to champion or develop industry-led solutions.

The first software vendor to develop a solution that fully supports the new business models will quickly assume market dominance. It is likely that this vendor will have teething issues as they work to refine a product to suit a market that is changing quickly. Associations must prioritise a close working relationship with developers to ensure success.

GENERATIONAL



Associations must bridge an ever-widening generational divide to be able to retain existing members and attract younger members.

Associations need to bridge an ever-widening generational divide. They must be able to pivot enough to create an organisation younger people want to join while also retaining (and not alienating) existing members.

The generational diversity in the workforce today is unparalleled in history. The rapid evolution of our society over the past 50 years has created a situation where our eldest members were born into a world that our youngest members do not relate to in any way.

This massive gap between generational perspectives has created a range of challenges for associations who need to make significant and fundamental changes to appeal to the younger market while putting in place strategies to avoid alienating the existing members.

Baby Boomers built the associations we know today.

Baby Boomers started their adult lives determined to change the world and they have certainly done so. During their working lives they have been the most likely to join, the most likely to renew, and the most likely to volunteer with associations.

The fact that Baby Boomers are willing to contribute their time and expertise to develop the associations they have joined, strongly contributed to the rise in the number and strength of member-based organisations from the 1970s onwards.

While there are indications from the research that younger members are showing greater tendencies to volunteer than Baby Boomers, there is a significant difference in the way each group executes that desire.

The younger generation want to engage with organisations they see as aspirational so they can contribute to the achievement of the purpose. Conversely, Baby Boomers are more willing to join an association that “needs some work” and has not yet become aspirational.

Baby Boomers have started to retire.

In 2011 the first Baby Boomers turned 65 and, finances permitting, the cohort is starting to retire in significant numbers. By 2029 most Baby Boomers will be retired and by 2034, the last of the generation will be 70 and very few members of this generation will still be active within their associations.

It will not be long before the membership - and staff - of every association will consist of people from Generation X, Generation Y (Millennials) and Generation Z.

This heralds a massive change for associations as they can no longer rely on the active, engaged, and supportive Baby Boomer cohort to support their growth.

The one mitigating factor is the economic issues facing many Baby Boomers today. The lifestyle aspirations of the Baby Boomers mean that nice cars, holidays, big homes and other luxuries are “needs” not “wants”.

This, combined with the effect of the relatively recent economic turmoil on investments and retirement savings, is likely to see many Baby Boomers extend their retirement age past 65, with many already indicating they will need to work until 75 to achieve their financial goals.

While not great news for Baby Boomers, extended retirement dates will soften the impact of this generation’s departure from the workforce by giving associations extra time to adapt. This is only temporary and not a reason to delay the necessary changes.

Baby Boomers designed associations entirely to their own tastes and preferences.

While the legacy of the Baby Boomers is an extremely positive one, their passion meant they built associations entirely to their own tastes.

Because Baby Boomers are so actively involved in their associations, the products, events, publications, services, communications, marketing, and decision-making structures within most associations are often geared almost entirely towards this group.

Many associations have concentrated their time and financial resources towards Baby Boomer orientated activities at the expense of investing resources into products and services geared towards younger people.

Appealing to younger generations effectively requires an innovative, proactive and member responsive culture throughout the entire association.

This isn’t just starting a Facebook page. It isn’t setting up a Young Professionals group that isn’t resourced nor connected to any other parts of the association. It certainly isn’t a Board made up almost entirely of white men over the age of 50 (particularly when your membership is not similarly represented) making decisions as to what prospective younger members need.

The kind of change required needs to be embedded throughout your entire organisation.

The younger generations have different needs and expectations from their membership.

Generation X grew up during times of high divorce rates where it was likely that both parents were working. They are highly independent, and very protective of their work-life balance.

Generation Y grew up with the internet and a constant barrage of messages from a variety of media. They are highly educated, innovative, entrepreneurial, cause

driven, marketing savvy and globally focussed. They are very aspirational and attracted to successful brands.

Generation Z are digital natives. They have never known a non-connected world nor a world prior to September 11. An exceptionally high-quality, seamless digital experience is an expectation they will not compromise.

Each group has vastly different expectations to Baby Boomers when it comes to association membership.

To justify the investment of time and/or money into an association they want to see clearly defined, tangible and compelling value - and not just when they join.

Younger members are constantly reassessing the value of the organisation to them, so your value needs regular reinforcing even after they join.

Younger members are loyal to people, not organisations. This means the departure of one charismatic association staff member or volunteer leader from the association can result in the loss of other members or staff.

They crave convenience, impact, and personalisation. They are used to ease and seek efficiency in the manner they engage. Associations must ensure that all platforms, systems and interaction mechanisms are simple and easy (eg: liking posts, voting, sharing). Otherwise they will not be used.

Younger people are great at multitasking and seek to combine outcome where possible. This creates opportunities for associations to provide opportunities to combine their strong societal values with opportunities to enhance their career or business outcomes.

They are much less willing to be a part of an association that “needs work”. They would rather be associated with a responsive, innovative, socially aware organisation they perceive to already be successful. If they can’t see that, they will look elsewhere. If they can’t find a solution here or overseas, then they are just as likely to start a new organisation that solves their specific issue.

Association leaders must be prepared to make the changes necessary to move forward.

There are still Baby Boomers in leadership roles who mistakenly believe the association can return to a “Golden Age” if they just stick to what worked in the past. This will not happen. What worked for Baby Boomer members will have the opposite affect on younger generations. Allowing an association to cling to past practices that are no longer effective, will result in its demise in the coming years.

Association leaders, including Boards, must be prepared to make changes that may not personally appeal to them in the interests of ensuring the long-term survival of the associations they have worked so hard to build.

COMPETITIVE



An influx of new and powerful competitors will disrupt the existing competitive landscape.

An influx of new and powerful competitors will disrupt the existing competitive landscape. Associations must deal with these new competitors, as well as the existing range of competitors. They will also need to navigate the impact of mergers and consolidations between associations and amongst the members of their associations.

There have always been competitors to associations. Often these only compete with some of the association's products, services, events, and publications. Too many small competitors can seriously erode the value proposition of an association and, unfortunately, it's never been easier to compete. Supported by easily available technology, enterprising individuals can easily create products and services that directly compete with associations – and even deliver it in a more digestible, easily accessible format.

Non-traditional and well-resourced competitors will enter traditional association markets.

Some of the biggest technology companies in the world are moving into this space and they have billions to spend to ensure success.

For example, LinkedIn have direct access to the largest network of professionals in the world and a deep knowledge of each. They recently launched LinkedIn Learning with the tag-line "Courses for every step of your career. Instructors with real-world experience". LinkedIn is seeking to engage and monetise its online community through providing professional development opportunities. These will compete directly with associations for a share of members finances and time. For associations who rely on the delivery of learning outcomes for members this should sound warning bells.

LinkedIn is only one of many examples of large for-profit entities, not traditionally competitive to associations, entering the competitive landscape.

Learning to look beyond the traditional competitive landscape to identify "left-field" competitors is an important skill set for an association wanting to successfully navigate the association apocalypse. Seeking similarly "left-field" solutions will enable them to more effectively adapt to this new environment.

Competition between associations will intensify as markets fragment and niches emerge.

There is an increasingly competitive landscape amongst associations as fragmentation of some markets becomes unsustainable. The ease of starting a new association means new associations representing every niche are popping up regularly. Many are barely sustainable and their struggle to survive can distract them from realising the outcome there were established for.

Many federated associations will become single entities to ensure their survival.

Even as the market continues to fragment, there are strong trends towards mergers and consolidations between associations.

In Australia, this is often a federated association merging to a single national entity. A federated structure is where each member (usually a state body) is a separate legal entity.

In some instances, there are valid reasons for a federated structure, and they operate effectively as a result.

However, for many associations the federated structure they operate within is a major inhibitor to achieving more powerful success.

Federated structures often force associations to divert their attention from their core purpose to resolve ongoing internal politics and power struggles between some or all states and/or between some or all states and national. This distraction benefits no-one and leaves the organisation vulnerable to competitors.

It is often difficult for federated structures to move forward effectively as they lack an effective decision-making process. While innovative ideas may exist within the structure, few of these entities have the processes in place to enable these ideas to progress. The fragmentation this creates leads to a negative effect on culture and provides fertile ground for duplication and inefficiency to thrive.

The savings from the removal of extensive duplication and overlap of work within federations would be significant and could provide the funds necessary for powerful change.

The drive to merge to a single entity will become more intense as the operating landscape becomes more perilous and consolidation is necessary for survival.

Where the national body is significantly stronger than the states, this can be straightforward as the economic imperative to survive will provide impetus to the process and speed consensus on a pathway forward.

Where the state bodies are stronger than the national office, mergers will remain challenging if not impossible. Invariably, the usual challenges of a merger are exacerbated by disputes over assets, clashes of egos, and the impact of self-interest and personal agendas.

For some, a merger will be an impossible task and compromise alternatives that will assist the members of the federation to remain financially viable will be found. That may include options such as a shared back office solution that reduces administrative overheads while enabling all parties to retain organisational independence.

Those choosing to merge must monitor the merger process carefully. While an association is undergoing a merger, it is often vulnerable to competitive forces as staff and volunteer leaders are distracted while they work through the process.

For this reason, mergers must be managed to ensure they are quick and smooth. Once a merger is in play, individuals involved in the process need to comprehend that any attempt to derail an active merger process can impact the very survival of the association.

Mergers and consolidations within membership will cause erosion of traditional fee income – and create competitive pressures.

It's not just mergers between associations that are trending.

Mergers and industry consolidation amongst the members of professional and industry associations are having a significant impact.

Mergers and consolidations between members reduce the number of potential members, reduce the fee income generated, and increase the risk of non-renewals – particularly if the new decision makers are located offshore.

Associations who are suffering from the effects of mergers and consolidations within their memberships often seek new members outside their traditional hunting ground to make up the fee income. Sadly, this strategy often ends up damaging all parties as it further fragments and confuses the market – and rarely leads to enduring new income streams.

In these instances, associations should consider new business models that leverage deepening their penetration into each organisational member.

By identifying service gaps and monetising the provision of these, the association can reinforce member value to existing members, generate additional revenue, and increase the likelihood of the member renewing.

TANGIBILITY



People don't care how many members you have. They care about the positive outcomes you create for themselves and the industry or profession

People are looking to engage with organisations who can deliver results not rhetoric. Associations must develop measurements of success around productive outcomes (not membership numbers) and be able to demonstrate the tangible difference they make.

People don't care how many members you have. Even your sponsors are more interested by the number of people you can influence (ie: your broader community).

Your members care about the positive outcomes you create for them and issues they care about.

It can be easy to become preoccupied around the number of members numbers you have. But it is important to remember that recruiting and retaining members is not an association's core purpose. Instead, membership is one of many tools that can assist an association to achieve its core purpose.

It is odd that many associations measure their success mostly on the number of members they recruit or retain. This is akin to judging the success of a builder by the number of bricks they lay rather than the quality of the houses they build.

Focusing solely on membership numbers distracts from the core purpose of the association. The measure of success should be the outcomes and outputs the association produces, rather than just a single element that contributes to that success.

This misguided prioritisation can cause issues when association leaders set overly ambitious membership targets driven by the need for revenue or numbers.

Without an equal emphasis on creating strong value, integrating new members, and engaging all members, these campaigns invariably fail, and the newly gained members leave as quickly as they came. And, in the process, no meaningful gains are made against the associations' core purpose or long-term sustainability.

A more meaningful way to measure the success of an association is through its ability to achieve tangible outcomes for its members. Eg: A change to the legislative environment or the skills to be able to undertake their role more successfully.

By shifting the focus from membership numbers to tangible outcomes, associations can mobilise the hearts and minds of members groups to powerful effect.

A strong purpose moves the relationship with members from transactional to emotional. And that emotional attachment is the glue that binds a member community.

To find your purpose, ask yourself questions such as "How would the world/profession/industry be worse off if your association didn't exist? What would our members miss?" and work from there to find out the tangible difference you can make.

PERSONALISATION



Associations personalise the membership experience to ensure each member feels the membership is valuable to them

In the highly personalised nature of the services we experience every day has created the expectation of customisation amongst our members. Associations cannot afford not to meet these baseline expectations. Associations need to excel at segmenting and personalise their offer and communications to different groups.

When asked “why” a member should join, many associations trot out the same old benefits ... “We have a magazine, events, a website, e-news, discounts, ...”.

This dull list of features applies to most associations and does not represent a benefit nor a compelling value proposition.

The real “value” in membership is intangible. The main motivator to join associations is rarely “to get a magazine”. It is more likely that members join for:

- A fantastic career
- A great lifestyle
- A happy family
- The ability to proactively influence the legislative environment for their company
- A successful business
- A healthy planet, or
- A positive outcome for a cause they support

Associations must be able to identify the value members are seeking and be able to translate these intangible value aspirations into strong tangible outcomes for individual members and others in their community.

By starting with the outcome (e.g. a more successful career) associations can develop a membership offering that contains powerful and tangible pathways through which members can create value. By creating value at a level that far exceeds their membership fee you create a reason for people to join.

What makes this challenging is that not all members want to realise value in the same way. Plus, the way they seek value will change over the course of their career.

Value is not a one-size-fits-all proposition.

Different segments want to realise value in different ways. Segmentation is critical. Associations need to understand the kind of value people are seeking now, and what value they will need in future, so they can legitimately claim to be a partner for the lifetime of that person's career (or time with the company).

In future, technology will enable this to be done easily. For now, a deep analysis of your market is an important step towards understanding the benefits each of your market segments requires to extract value from their membership.

This is much more than just sending out a survey. Most surveys are badly constructed and the only people who

respond are people who either love you or hate you. This is about doing the work to have a deep understanding of each segment and the pathway members journey along.

By understanding how segments are looking to realise value from the association you can focus your offer to each segment. The success of all future membership marketing activities will be profoundly affected by your segment choices and how they are implemented.

Segmentation models are evolving

There are numerous ways you can segment your membership. Some of the top-level segments used by associations include:

For organisational members

- Stage of the business life cycle
- Type of business or product line
- Production units, turnover, gross revenues, floor space, or profit
- Number or location of sites
- Number of staff/members or percentage of payroll.

For individual members

- Stage of the career life cycle
- Specialisation or interest area
- Education or qualification level
- Salary or income
- Benefits sought or Product usage

The most relevant options will vary between different associations. What's important is to ensure those put into a segment:

- Have similar needs, wants, and motivations
- Have similar responses to the same marketing
- Are accessible through the same marketing channels
- Are an appropriate size to target, and
- Are accessible

Each segment selected should be demonstrably different from each other.

Some associations are introducing innovative membership categories that reflect the level of involvement the members want, or the range of services they are seeking to access such as:

- **Choose your own adventure** - a base fee with the ability for members to choose the services they want.
- **Contribution Impact level** – Such as the AIGA in the US where people can join as a contributing, supporting, sustaining, design leader or trustee.
- **Outcomes sought** – Such as Philanthropy Australia where members can go as New Gen, Connect, Active, Engaged, or Impact.

While some of these new concepts have merit, it can be difficult for an association who has never undertaken this kind of work previously to develop and implement.

If looking for solutions be careful not to copy another associations' approach without first speaking to them in-depth. Just because someone is following a pathway doesn't mean it is working for them.

A deep understanding of each market segment enables a powerful personalised offering.

The easiest way to understand the value each segment is seeking is to ask specific questions. For example, if undertaking an analysis of the "student" segment you could ask the following questions:

- *What do we know about this segment?* This includes data about the segment (e.g. member retention rate, first year retention rate, growth rate, penetration into the available market) and insights from research.
- *What is the overarching value they are seeking?* For a student it may be that they want a fantastic career and a great lifestyle to go with it. If they can kick a few social goals along the way that's even better.
- *What's their problem? What do they worry about at night?* For a student that may be a lack of understanding about career pathways, a fear of taking the wrong first step, lack of money, lack of connection to the profession.
- *What value promise would answer those concerns?* For a student this could be "We will help you take the best first step possible into your career".
- *What product, services, publications, events would enable us to fulfil that value promise?* For a student that may be that you will help them:
 - Understand their career pathways options (e.g. career fairs, handbooks, recent graduates)
 - Find a job (e.g. student placement services)
 - Build personal networks (e.g. mentoring)
 - Access professional specific education (student pathways to events)
 - Save them money (e.g. discounts on items they will need at the start of their career)

Information about your segments should be disseminated amongst staff and volunteer leaders in an way that enables them to have more engaging conversations about value with members and prospects.

Constant innovation is necessary to maintain a competitive offering.

In a highly competitive environment associations will not be able to "set and forget" their membership offering. There will always be competitive organisations making offers that will erode your association's value proposition. Constant vigilance and innovation will ensure your value is the best available.

Ongoing feedback and analysis of data from each segment you target will also help you with continual improvement of your offerings, and therefore an increased chance of survival and success.

COMMUNITY



One of the most powerful competitive advantages available to associations is a strong and engaged community.

The most successful associations will be those who are able to become the facilitators of positive connections amongst their community. Those who can also activate the tribes within their community will have created a powerful competitive advantage for themselves.

While there will always be competitors for some or all association products and services, a highly engaged association community is difficult to compete against and represents a strong competitive advantage.

Associations can build a strong community by becoming the facilitators of meaningful engagement between members in a manner that increases the ability of members to create value for themselves and others.

As members become more engaged their likelihood of them renewing vastly increases. But engagement doesn't happen by accident. Each step of the member journey must be carefully planned and executed to create consistently strong engagement amongst members.

For associations with organisational members this can be challenging as engagement pathways need to be created for all the different types of individuals within the member organisation.

Activating your segments and tribes is a great way to build a strong community quickly

A helpful tool when building an association community is to understand the market segments as well as the various tribes within your community. Understanding the key segments and tribes within your community – and activating each of these effectively – is a powerful way to build a strong community quickly. Particularly where the community is fostering inclusivity through innovative approaches to service delivery.

Tribes differ from market segments

Market segments are defined by the association (e.g.: student members). Tribes are groups that already exist that the association identifies (e.g.: students who support a specific issue and want to connect with others of the same values to advance that issue).

Tribes are groups of people driven by a shared interest, passion, needs or habits. They have a feeling of identity separate to other groups and its members may reflect people with a range of expertise, experience, and qualifications (traditional segmentation criteria).

Tribes are characterised as a friendship and/or social network that is regularly reinforced (either online or offline). Altruism within the group is common.

When considering your strategy moving forward, an understanding of your broader market segments will set you in the right direction. Then a knowledge of the tribes within those segments will enable you to refine and focus your strategy further.

Creating strong tribes and communities needs careful planning and a dedicated resource

Building strong communities can be achieved most quickly by identifying and reinforcing these groups. Ways to assist these groups to be successful include:

- Identifying those individuals who act as “connectors” and “influencers” within target groups and provide motivation and support to enable them to drive those group more easily.
- Ensure the group has a specific purpose (or a many smaller purposes) that are motivating to the members.
- Ensure robust pathways into the tribe to avoid the tribe becoming a clique.
- Create an effective way for members of the group to communicate easily.
- If one exists, ensure the focus is on a shared enemy or set of adverse circumstances that will focus attention outwards.
- Ensure you identify and use the shared language (this is often particular words or acronyms that are specific to the group).
- Provide clear calls to action to motivate people to act.
- Understand the “rules” that govern how the group operates and, if appropriate, assist them to enforce these.
- Look to create connections between tribes wherever it will meaningfully contribute to creating outcomes.
- Appoint at least one staff member responsible for ensuring the above happens.

Avoid the temptation to create large tribes. After the optimal number of participants is reached humans use hierarchy, stereotypes, and other simplified models to navigate groups which can make them less effective. The optimal number for tribes is often debated. Dunbar’s number puts the optimal size of a manageable tribe at 150 persons however Bernard-Killworth’s median is 231.

Tribes and communities can be leveraged when trying to implement change

Tribes can be leveraged to undertake effective change management. By engaging the leaders, influencers, and connectors within each tribe you can more rapidly shift or create support for initiatives throughout the community. When key people signal an acceptance of a change or idea then others will follow. These subtle signals can be more powerful than using a big stick.

By understanding the motivations of influencers, you can structure your communications with them around those motivators to generate a favourable response (e.g.: ego, influence, competitive nature, altruism, ambition)

For this to be sustainable, associations must invest in the identification and nurturing of emerging leaders, connectors and influencers.

ASSOCIATIONS WILL NEED TO FUNDAMENTALLY TRANSFORM TO SURVIVE

Associations cannot rely on business models suited for an era that has now passed. Innovation and entrepreneurship must be embedded operationally as associations fundamentally transform their business models, membership models, and component frameworks. This section discusses each of these in more detail.

A



BUSINESS MODELS



Associations will move away from the “provider of services” model to become a platform that facilitates an active member community.

Associations will move away from purely relying on the “provider of services” model to become a platform that facilitates positive outcomes for members as well as the professional or industry community. This will create a range of new revenue generation opportunities.

Associations have an opportunity to step into a new business model that enables them to mobilise the full power of their industry or professional community. But it will mean a fundamental shift from traditional models...

Traditional association business models are no longer effective as they cannot effectively support the cultivation of powerful communities.

Unfortunately, traditional association business models limit the ability of associations to successfully implement a community orientated business model.

Traditionally, associations have provided a suite of benefits to members in return for a membership fee. Those benefits included publications, services, products, advocacy, and communications. Associations have become very accustomed to being service providers.

Traditionally, associations have maintained a transactional relationship with members, where the main communication channel is a one-way trip from association to member. The default is “association to member” rather “association facilitating member to member”.

Traditionally, associations have used membership as the yardstick of involvement. If someone joins, they are part of the association community. If they don't join or renew, then they are not part of the association community. By excluding or severely limiting the access of non-members into your community, associations are limiting their ability to fully mobilise an industry or profession.

For these reasons and more, traditional models are increasingly ineffective for most associations. A number of associations have opened avenues for non-members to engage and this is a positive first step.

There is a reluctance by many to change as they have become reliant on the revenue delivered within their current structure and cannot afford the risk of any potential loss of income.

Associations must look to develop pathways forward that will manage the revenue risk while enabling the shift to a model that will more effectively align with the core purpose of the association.

Associations must evolve to become platforms rather than service providers.

Gradually associations are becoming just one of many providers in a heavily competitive landscape. As competitors erode the value propositions of most associations, it is getting harder to demonstrate value using a traditional “provider of services” model.

To overcome this, associations can evolve to become a platform for the exchange or promotion of ideas, products, events, information, and/or services. By doing so, associations can make themselves the platform upon which their industry or profession connects. Thereby also making their competitors their customers.

For example: associations are typically providers of training services. These may struggle as competitors also run events (some of equal or greater quality) and it becomes harder to make training programs sustainable. Also, the desire of groups within your membership to have events run specifically for them creates a logistical challenge for associations who are not resourced to run an unlimited number of specific events.

Consider if, instead of continuing to compete, a proactive association was to become the aggregator for all high-quality events run for its core market (even those by organisations previously considered competitors). Those running events would be vetted to ensure they were suitable (even via a “TripAdvisor” like mechanism for delegates to review the events they have attended). The association would then promote those events. In this situation the association would be generating a highly profitable, low risk revenue stream.

In the example above, the association would have a highly profitable revenue stream that carries little risk (as they are not running the event). The association could leverage income in many ways such as a percentage of all revenue generated, event listing fees, and, potentially, from organising sponsorships that cover the events of many different providers.

The community would see the association as the “go-to” when looking for high-quality events run in their sector – creating a strong motivation for people to engage with the community.

Naturally, promotion to the association’s community would be highly segmented to ensure the association’s communications were welcome and relevant.

A shift to this kind of business model enables an association to completely re-define its position in the market.

Associations can learn from the success of LinkedIn when updating business models.

LinkedIn is a powerful platform. It is a community where most of the memberships are free, yet the company is still highly profitable.

Associations considering moving to a platform model can take away several learnings from LinkedIn, including:

- **To get involved is easy and free.** It costs nothing to set up and populate your LinkedIn profile. This provides LinkedIn with a huge benefit as they have prospects actively engaging with the system.
- **You generate benefits immediately.** As soon as your profile is set up, you can start to connect to others, find or create content, apply for jobs, and otherwise start realising the benefits of the community. Free members are active users and help create the high level of content and group interactions that keep the Premium members retained.
- **You only pay for what you need.** Your LinkedIn profile may be free, but if you want to intensely generate value from the community you need to pay. You can choose to only pay for what you use (e.g. to list a job, advertise your services, access new connections, etc). Getting people to use the service on an ad-hoc basis is a great way to move people along the pipeline to a Premium membership.
- **LinkedIn has a Premium Membership for power users.** LinkedIn has a very profitable premium membership for intense users of the service. Their premium membership expert blends FOMO (Fear of Missing Out), such as enabling premium members to see a full list of who has viewed their profile, with practical benefits, such as the ability to view and connect to an unlimited number of people.
- **Their automated marketing actively generates a baseline of new members.** Free LinkedIn members are regularly invited to try Premium membership for free (a “taster”). Many don’t try it. Some do. And some of those retain their Premium membership past the trial. This process generates LinkedIn a steady stream of Premium members, is automated, and costs little.
- **LinkedIn facilitates communities but doesn’t run them.** LinkedIn is a great place to find and join professional communities. All content is entirely member generated as LinkedIn is just the provider of the platform that connects people.
- **LinkedIn is monetising its community by providing new products.** LinkedIn Learning is just one of many products that will enable LinkedIn to generate strong income streams from its strong and engaged community.

MEMBERSHIP STRUCTURES



Associations must evolve more competitive and intuitive membership models that align with members needs and preferences

Associations will adopt more intuitive membership structures, fees, and payment methods to align with the new business models and changes to the way people live and work.

There is no "one-size-fits-all" when it comes to creating an effective membership structure. Membership structures and fees vary between associations with a wide variety of models currently in use.

While a good membership structure can make it easier for members to join and renew, it will not be the defining reason someone will engage (or not engage) with your organisation. But it will make it much easier to recruit and retain members.

Membership models are needing to adapt to changes in the way people work and live.

Many people now regularly change their career, and sometimes have multiple careers at the same time. To capture this rapidly growing market, membership models will need to evolve to reflect the flexibility of modern life.

Structures need to be created that enable all parts of the association community to actively engage. What these are will differ depending on the type of organisation but could include consideration of segments such as part-time employees, micro-businesses, parental leave, sabbatical leave, new career or starting up businesses. Incorporating the full range of the community enables the association to extend its influence into the broader profession or industry.

Associations with organisational members need a structure that enables them to engage with as many individual contacts as possible within each member organisation to maximise retention and renewals.

Associations who have organisational members must ensure they maintain relationships with as many people within each member as possible to maximise the likelihood that member renewing.

It is no longer acceptable to have one primary contact who receives everything and a handful of secondary contacts who receive barely anything.

Associations need to obtain the contact details for as many people within the organisation as possible and develop tailored, relevant communications for each. For example, the CEO, Business Development Manager, Chief Financial Officer and Marketing Manager have specific needs and customisation of association communications and offerings is necessary to remain relevant to each.

This means understanding the value sought by each individual and then developing a uniquely tailored membership experience.

Society is being conditioned to “pay by the month” and “pay as you use” models

Some of the biggest companies in the world have been conditioning the global population to “pay by the month” and “pay as you use”.

Streaming services are a good example; you pay by the month, subscribe to often more than one provider, upgrade or downsize your package inclusions, and switch and change provider as often as you want without long term commitments. As long as there is current value you stay engaged with a service.

Associations are rapidly following these models.

Many associations already offer monthly direct debit and/or direct credit and soon there will be few that don't. There are several strong arguments for implementing direct debit:

- It changes the buying decision. If your annual fee is \$600 and this must be paid in-full on joining, there will be times where the prospective member wants to join but simply doesn't have the money to invest. The ability to pay by the month means the member need only pay \$50 to join, a sum they are far more likely to have available.
- A rolling direct debit will increase retention rates. If you structure your direct debit so that it automatically rolls over next year (like the way most personal insurance products operate) then member apathy will help enhance renewal rates.

There are drawbacks to direct debit.

- The most complained about is the need to update member credit card details and bank account details. While this is inconvenient, there are a proliferation of companies to whom you can outsource this job at very reasonable rates.
- In rare cases, there can be some adverse impact on cashflow. For example, if your association is used to receiving the majority of membership fee income in June each year you may skew your outgoing to match. Should the majority of members switch to direct debit then funds would be receipted over the course of the 12 months following and outgoings need to be adjusted to fit this.

Using the correct terminology to describe your membership offering is a critical element of setting member expectations.

Although it may seem pedantic, the correct use of terminology to label your membership offering is a critical element of setting member expectations.

For example, when you use the term “member” it creates the perception that the member will be receiving a benefit in return for payment of a fee. This is not appropriate for a charity if they are seeking “members” as a pseudo-donation.

Alternatively, the term “supporter” implies that fees paid contribute to the purpose of the organisation. This is very suitable for a charity seeking to find a way for supporters to “buy into” the organisation.

Using intuitive member categorisation makes marketing membership easier.

Aligning membership categories with market segments enables easier marketing of specific product mixes, and communication content and formats for specific segments.

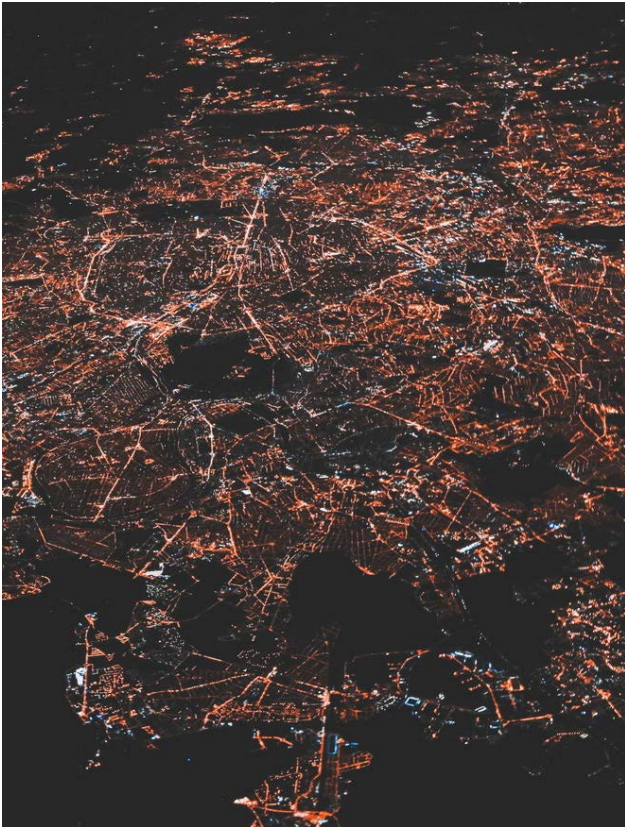
For example, you may have a market segment called “New Business Owners”. If you have a deep understanding of that market you will have developed an offer and a communication strategy specifically for that group. Consider making that market segment a membership category with a suite of benefits only available to that segment. This way, when someone joins in that category, they are letting you know what market segment they belong to.

Intuitive member categories make marketing membership easier as prospective members can easily identify the category most appropriate to them.

Using your segments as membership categories can overcome the issues caused using non-intuitive membership categories like “Affiliate”, “Associate”, “Full Member” and “Standard Member”. These terms only have meaning to those internal to your association and should be avoided. In some cases, you may be making an inference that may be poorly received by the member or prospective member. For example - using the term “Associate member” implies that you are not as good as a “Full member”.

If your constitution uses the non-intuitive terms, this should not be an issue. The terminology you use to market membership does not necessarily need to be the same as the terminology used in the constitution. You can make the link via the explanatory text for the membership category or in your terms and conditions.

COMPONENT FRAMEWORKS



Associations must adopt more distributed frameworks that enable the association community to engage more freely.

Most association components (such as branches, special interest groups, committees) are based on traditional centralised or decentralised frameworks that limit the associations ability to mobilise their communities. Association will better leverage the power of their communities by moving to more innovative distributed models.

The term “component” within the association context refers to the variety of groups that sit within the association remit such as special interest groups, branches, sub-committees, working groups and Boards.

Many of these components are a legacy of the history of the association. For many charities and quite a few associations, the local support groups and networking groups are where their organisation grew from.

As the operating landscape has changed the role of these legacy components has also evolved. In some cases, it has evolved to a situation where there is an uneasy fit between these components and the rest of the organisation. For example, a branch office that rarely has a member walk through the door and duplicates many of the functions of the national office, or a charity with a support group network that is slowly dying out.

Components are an important part of a strong community.

A component framework is an important element of building a strong community. Components provide the association with a tool to create pathways for different tribes to engage with the association in ways they feel comfortable.

The difference between traditional and newer component models.

Traditional component frameworks are usually permanent groups (such as branches set up to service a geographic location or special interest groups looking after a specialisation) and the individuals governing that group change periodically.

In this kind of structure there is the potential for the component to become dominated by one member, or a small faction of members, which can alienate other members and impact the overall success of the association.

While many of these components had a strong purpose when they were formed, often this has faded, and the group continues to exist because it has always done so - not because it has a purpose that defines it.

This doesn't mean traditional frameworks should not exist. But they should be reviewed to ensure they are still aligned with – and supporting – the core purpose of the association.

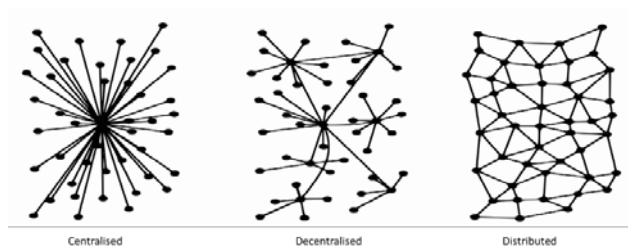
The newer component frameworks are driven by purpose. This has led to a larger emphasis on ad-hoc groups that have a clear mandate for existence with key performance indicators that enable tracking of how successful it is in achieving that purpose. Components are formed to fulfil a specific purpose (often driven by members); members are selected based on whether their participation will ensure the successful attainment of the purpose; and the component ceases to exist once the purpose is attained.

This flexibility provides a larger range of avenues within which members can participate. It also provides pathways that suit the different kinds of engagement people want. For example, a student volunteer may be willing to look after the registration desk at your conference. Conversely, a very senior and highly experienced member may only be interested in contributing their expertise to a specific issue.

Distributed networks are a powerful addition to an association component strategy.

The cycle of decentralise-centralise-decentralise is one that has existed within association for many years. Unfortunately, neither option is ever the perfect solution as both require the association to make assumption and create structures that the members would often be better determining themselves.

There is still a need for association coordinated groups, there is also a need for the association to get out of the way and enable members to create their own pathways forward. The means integrating distributed component frameworks into the association component strategy.



The most successful method for undertaking this process is to become a platform that allows people to connect and form tribes independently of the active involvement of the association. By creating the mechanisms that facilitates but doesn't dictate associations can create a solid foundation upon which communities can grow.

The enables membership within the association community to create their own components within the association frameworks – creating their own value and attributing it to the association. E.g: a Facebook group.

Unfortunately, this requires the skill to develop and implement a distributed model of engagement which is a challenge for those associations who feel more comfortable operating within centralised or decentralised structure.

STRATEGY WILL ONLY BE SUCCESSFUL IF STRONG OPERATIONAL ENABLERS ARE IN PLACE

You cannot build a powerful building without ensuring it has strong foundations that will support the structure. In the same way, associations cannot grow effectively without the 11 operational “enablers” in place. These are: Leadership, Governance, Strategy, Staff, Financial, Processes, Technology, Offer, Brand, Communications, and Engagement. An association who can achieve success in these ten areas will have created the foundations upon which it can grow strongly and sustainably into the future. This section discusses these in more detail.



LEADERSHIP

A dynamic, cohesive leadership team, comprising the Board, the CEO and any senior staff, who have a clear vision of the future, the pathway to get there, and the motivation to achieve it.

In the 25+ years I've been working in associations the only consistent characteristic of all the successful associations I've come across has been the quality of the association leadership team.

Leadership is distinct from governance. An association can have good governance without having effective leadership.

The leadership team of an association can vary but is generally comprised of the CEO, senior staff, and the Board.

Leadership in the association space is changing with new leadership models and techniques becoming popular (such as Agile leadership) and providing ways to engage internally and externally more effectively.

Some of the characteristics of associations with awesome leadership teams are:

- a shared vision of where the association is going,
- agreement on the pathway to get there, and
- the ability to make staff and other stakeholders' enthusiastic participants on the journey forward.

Elements of a successful leadership team include:

- A great working relationship between the Board and the CEO (particularly the President and the CEO).
- The ability for all members of the leadership team to consider the data, look for innovative solutions, and have robust yet respectful discussions.
- Effective translation of the vision into a strategic plan that is realistic and invests resources appropriately.
- Effective translation of the strategic plan into operational tasks and KPIs that will meaningfully contribute to achieving those objectives.
- The willingness to ensure staff have a strong understanding of how their role contributes to the success of the association and enthusiastically participates in the direction of the organisation.
- Effective governance of the association.

Great leadership is essential for the development, implementation and success of transformational change.

GOVERNANCE

A well-run, supportive Board that has up-to-date and sound governance in place, and that embraces innovation, "nimbleness" and strategic oversight.

Much has changed since the most common used reference for meeting procedure in the English-speaking work (Robert's Rules of Order) was published in 1876.

Most association constitutions were written when the idea that one erroneous tweet could bring down an entire association within hours would have been greeted with incredulity.

Unfortunately, many associations still labour under archaic governance structures and processes. While some elements are still valid, there are many elements overdue for an update.

Doing things "the way we've always done them" is a weight that often permeates through the association and affects performance and outcomes at every level.

The fast paced, tech savvy, shifting operational landscape of today needs a modern governance structure to match. Particularly as the effectiveness of the Board has such a massive impact on success of the entire association.

Implementing the change required is difficult in associations where one or more Board members are resistant to the level of change required to move their associations into the future.

Some feel uncomfortable with the fast, ad-hoc, largely unregulated communication media that many see as integral to their daily lives. They may also be reluctant to adopt more innovative initiatives because those initiatives don't appeal to them personally or are even just unwilling to give up the power they have waited so long to attain.

It is this kind of self-centred thinking that will lead some associations to fall dangerously behind in the race to adapt to the new landscape the perfect storm is creating.

For an association to undertake the kind of transformation needed to thrive into the future, the entire Board must be prepared to be open to transformational ideas and allow themselves to be guided by good research to understand the best pathway forward into the future.

First steps to change may include changing the board composition to get the right skills, and changing mindsets through having the right strategic discussions that open minds and challenge assumptions. There are many tools and techniques available to support progress.

Characteristics of a Successful Board

A successful Board is characterised by:

- Great relationships between the Board and staff team that are respectful and allow fearless discussions.
- A culture that enthusiastically embraces ongoing Board training including opportunity to engage personally with other members to broaden horizons.
- A focus on strategy and asking of strategic questions (such as “Are we resourcing what’s important?”) while avoiding micromanaging the staff team.
- Strong, written, policies, and procedures that clearly define the roles, scope, and workings of the Board – followed by all Board members.
- Reporting frameworks and agenda formats that provide insights and context to ensure evidence-based decision making.
- Well-designed decision-making processes to provide the confidence to make the tough decisions and ensure rigorous processes to reduce risk.
- A structure that effectively incorporates the perspectives of members and components.
- Nimble processes that enable informed and timely decisions making and ensure the Board does not inhibit the successful implementation of strategy.
- A broad range of diversity (e.g.: age, gender) and skills (governance, finance, law, and technology).
- A manageable size (usually seven to nine people).

Characteristics of a Successful Board Member

A Board member on a successful board should have:

- An understanding of the context of associations as well as their own industry or professional.
- Passion for the purpose of the association.
- The commitment, attentiveness, and motivation to contribute effectively including performing tasks within deadlines, attending meetings, pre-reading Board papers, and responding to requests between meetings promptly.
- The strength to show respect to other Board members and association staff – even during challenging discussions.
- The capacity to remain strategically focused - even when tempted to become operational.
- The ability to avoid the temptation to allow personal agendas, pet projects unrelated to the strategic direction of the association, and grievances with other members impact their conduct.
- The skill to undertake the role including the ability to interpret financial reports, critically read other reports, and ask questions to ensure they fully understand the information provided.
- A clear understanding of the role of the Board and including if relevant the Corporations Act and the duties of a Director as required by law. Boards are no longer advisory councils and have specific defined purposes to consider.

STRATEGY

Evidence-based strategic planning processes that create measurable, time-dependent objectives that flow throughout the association as an operational KPIs. Effective monitoring and reporting against the strategy that feeds into the ongoing strategy refinement process.

Robust strategic planning enables the development of a clear roadmap forward to achieving an inspiring vision of the future.

To successfully navigate the changing operating landscape, associations must evolve their strategic planning process to match the pace of these changes.

Shorter strategic planning cycles will enable associations to adapt more nimbly to change. The strategic plan should a deceptively simple document – a good plan should be able to be visually summarised on a single A4 page and should contain:

- A strong purpose.
- A powerful vision for the future of the organisation.
- A compelling short to medium term objective.
- Specific, measurable goals and strategies that combine to form a logical pathway forward to the objective.
- Hero projects that will define goals where appropriate.

The effective operationalisation and implementation of the strategic planning process is critical for its success. Staff KPIs, association resourcing and job descriptions should derive from the goals and strategies within the strategic plan.

Ensure Evidence Based Decision Making

Information is power. Data driven decision making and reporting ensures insights usefully inform the decision-making and strategy development process to produce a successful outcome.

The kind of person who participates on a Board represents only a tiny segment of the membership population. It is therefore logical to assume that their opinions are not reflective of the perspective of the entire membership and the broader community.

For this reason, it is imperative associations have strong frameworks for gathering data and converting that data into useful insights. These should be collated into a logical reporting format that provides context for reporting against the strategy and ensures decisions are based on evidence rather than opinion.

It is essential associations become adept at collecting, managing, and interpreting data to enable exponentially increasing effectiveness of decision making and planning processes.

Ensure Goals are Realistic

Part of developing a strategy is setting goals. Setting completely unrealistic goals can be tremendously demotivating for a staff and leadership team and lead to significant adverse outcomes.

Having the right data available as assist associations to test goals to ensure they are realistic.

For example, with 2020 fast approaching many associations set overly ambitious membership targets that did not stand up to scrutiny and served only to completely demotivate their staff team.

Say an association with 2,100 members as at December 31, 2017 set a target of 3,000 members by 2020. Using historical data, we can test this goal ...

If their best retention rate was 90% (not a bad rate) and the greatest number of new members they had ever recruiting in a single year was 250 then we can do a "best case scenario" test.

In 2018, if they equal their best retention rate and number of new members then they would have 2140 members at the end of the year $((2100 \times 90\%) + 250)$.

If they repeated this in 2019, they would have 2176 members $((2140 \times 90\%) + 250)$. If they repeated this again in 2020, they would have 2208 members $((2176 \times 90\%) + 250)$.

If they matched their greatest ever performance for both recruitment and retention over the three years, the best possible result would be 2,208 members. Nowhere near their 3,000-member goal.

If you always do what you've always done, you will always get the same result or worse. The only way that target could be realistic is if the association is making a fundamental change to the way they operate to meet that goal.

Having the data available to test the goal enables the association to identify where they need to reassess the goal or invest heavily in the resources required to significantly vary the outcome.

Having the data to monitor implementation of the goal also enables an association to act in agile ways responding to the process dynamically as things progress and change along the way.

The kind of strategy you develop will depend on the kind of membership you offer and the type of association you are

Broadly speaking, there are three types of membership associations can offer:

- **Member Benefit** – Organisations whose objectives are to produce a positive outcome for members. Includes professional associations (who create positive career outcomes for individual members) and industry associations (who create positive outcomes for member businesses).
- **Public Benefit** - Organisations whose objectives are to produce a positive outcome for groups with a specific need from the wider community (who may never even have heard of the organisation). Includes social service organisations (who support those in need of assistance), foundations (who give funds to support social outcomes), and some charities.
- **Hybrid Benefit** – Organisations whose objectives are a mix of Member-Benefit and Public-Benefit are increasingly common. A example is the Mathematical Association of Victoria, which target membership and services directly to mathematics educators and students, while raising the importance of 'Valuing Mathematics in Society' through working with industry, universities and government get more individuals into mathematics and STEM based careers to increase future economic outcomes.

The kind of membership you offer, and the type of association you are, will influence the strategy and the operational execution. There are a huge number of different types of membership organisation and each has different success factors that need to be considered when planning. A non-exhaustive list of association types includes:

- **First Career Professional Associations** - Professional associations exist to assist their members to be successful in their profession - such as law, engineering, or medicine. These bodies are predominately made up of members who follow a relatively set career path that starts with formal tertiary qualifications. E.g. Australian Medical Association. They are mostly made up of individual members at various stages of their careers. They often have organisational members who are mainly suppliers to the sector. Increasingly these associations are adopting some organisational types of membership (E.g. Practice Memberships). This type of association often uses special programs to engage with students and graduates.
- **Second Career Professional Associations** - Associations that represent professions whose members tend to gravitate to careers in that

profession after first working elsewhere are called second career professional associations. E.g. Australasian Society of Association Executives. These associations typically have individuals as members with suppliers to their profession joining as organisational members. Often, they have older members than first career professional bodies and lack the student/graduate prospective member funnel enjoyed by first career professional bodies.

- **Industry bodies / Industry Associations** - Industry bodies exist to assist businesses in their industry to be successful, thus their members are usually organisations. Organisational membership structures can be challenging as within each organisation you need to be able to identify the decision makers, decision influencers, and end users. It is then necessary to maintain relationships with more than one individual within that organisation to minimise risk should one person move on. This is particularly important where the people using the association's services are not the renewal decision makers.
- **Hybrid Associations** - Occasionally you will find associations that perform the functions of both a professional and industry body who have a mix of individual and organisational members. This can sometimes be challenging as often one of the biggest roles of an industry body is the provision of industrial relations advice. Having both the organisation and their staff as members can lead to potential conflicts of interest.
- **Charities** - Implementing membership structures into charities is becoming more prevalent with membership numbers in some charities outstripping all but the largest professional associations and industry bodies. In charities and other public benefit organisations, there are often both individual and organisational members – depending on the purpose of the membership structure for those associations. Charities generally experience a special range of membership issues including the life cycle of the condition or cause and, when targeting the public for membership, finding appropriate channels to market membership.
- **Others** - Membership is a tool being utilised by a wide variety of other for-profit and not-for-profit organisations including for-profit loyalty programs (Qantas Club and FlyBys), Trade Unions, Sporting Clubs, Churches, Chambers of Commerce, Political Parties, Arts and Cultural Institutions (E.g. Adelaide Zoo), Alumni Associations, Community Organisations (Neighbourhood Watch, Bushcare), Parents and Citizens Associations, Hobby Clubs (E.g. Doctor Who Fan Club), Service Club (Apex, Rotary, Masons), and many more. Each of these has a specific set of membership challenges that needs to be accounted for when developing a membership model.

STAFF

A healthy, passionate, outcomes-focused, collaborative workplace that does not tolerate toxic staff members.

The most successful associations are facilitators of engaged communities. Communities are built on relationships and are nurtured by people.

Specifically, your staff team.

People are no longer loyal to companies. Instead they are loyal to people. To build and maintain a strong community your entire staff team is responsible for creating deep connections with members while undertaking their job.

To do this well your workplace needs to be comprised of people with the skills to do the work and the passion to want to do it well. If you expect your staff to nurture your member community, then you need to ensure your staff team are equally well nurtured. This means creating the kind of workplace people aspire to work in. This means giving staff:

- a purpose they can emotionally buy into
- a plan to achieve that purpose
- the means to celebrate achievement against the plan
- robust frameworks to operate within
- the freedom to be innovative and show leadership in the undertaking of their role.
- a clear understanding of how their role connects to organisational outcomes.
- the mentoring, training and support that will ensure they have the skills to execute their role well.

It's also requires identifying and removing:

- the roadblocks that frustrate their efforts to do their jobs well (e.g. decision-making bottlenecks)
- the operational dissatisfiers which make their job difficult (e.g. sub-standard computers), and
- toxic staff members who have the potential to destroy a good culture if allowed to fester.

Other factors that will help to structure a workforce that will meet the changing landscape effectively include:

- Encouraging a relationship-based approach to sales - Staff should understand that promoting association services helps people – not just generates revenue.
- Outsourcing non-core activities (e.g. graphic design) – Outsourcing is an excellent way to retain flexibility and enable the association to remain nimble. This enables salaried positions to be focused onto member facing and mission critical areas (e.g. community engagement).

FINANCIAL

Strong, diversified income streams; pro-active minimisation of inefficiencies; and effective financial management.

Financial sustainability can only be ensured with diversified revenue streams and creative pricing strategies.

Ideally associations should have 4-5 strong revenue sources implemented in a considered way. When looking at implementing new revenue streams:

- Avoid falling into the trap of trying to implement all at once. Ensure you are giving each the time and resources to grow (seeing them up always takes longer than you think it will).
- Try to work towards a situation where no one revenue stream accounts for the majority of your income.
- Avoid breaching your members trust by implementing a product, service, or revenue stream you cannot deliver in a compelling way.

Corporate Partnerships are evolving

The way associations undertake sponsorships and partnerships is evolving. One-off sponsorships are being replaced by longer term partnerships and bundling of opportunities as associations seek to streamline business development processes and maximise outcomes for all parties.

Associations have realised they can generate strong and sustainable income streams through establishing multi-year partnerships with a carefully curated suite of partners, whose values are in line with those espoused by the association. Implemented correctly, this strategy is a great way to generate strong income streams and create member value.

Associations are starting to be strategic about the number and dollar value of partnerships.

A single, extremely high value, corporate partner is high risk as the association becomes too financially dependent. Conversely, having many small partnerships can become onerous to service and difficult to manage. High partner churn is also common as sales opportunities are divided between too many competitive partners and generating a return on investment for each partner becomes almost impossible.

Associations are moving to a carefully curated suite of high value partners where they can form enduring relationships that benefit members, the association, and the partner.

PROCESSES

Strong policies and procedures embedded into the technological framework of the association, that streamlines operations, maximises efficiencies to save staff time and money, and ensures a consistently awesome member experience.

Associations must ensure they are implementing policies and processes that will create efficiencies and optimise the member experience. These must be embedded into the technology supporting the association and regularly reviewed.

Policies and procedures must be designed through the lens of the member experience as it is the emotional relationship members have with the association that will determine if they renew or not. Processes that threaten this should be avoided.

This applies throughout the association including to all processes around building your community, and recruiting, retaining, and engaging members such as:

- **Lead Generation** - How do you generate leads, qualify to see if they are valid prospects, capture them into your database and segment them for future follow up?
- **Prospect Relationship Management** - How do you develop and maintain a relationship with prospective members that gets them engaged without giving away all your member benefits?
- **Sales Process** - What passive processes do you have in place to ensure prospective members are able to access compelling information to join? What follow up processes are in place? What active member recruitment campaigns are running?
- **New Member Integration** – What pathways do you have in place to ensure new members are quickly engaged to become actively involved in your member community?
- **Member Relationship Management** - How do you maintain the perception by members that they are better off as members than non-members? How do you engage members to ensure they feel part of the member community?
- **Renewal Process** - How can you get as many members as possible renewing as early as possible? What lapsed member follow up processes are in place?
- **Reactivation Process** - With 50% of non-renewals due to reasons that are unrelated to their membership, past members are excellent prospects. What processes do you have in place for managing relationships with past members? What campaigns do you actively undertake into this group?

TECHNOLOGY

Technology that optimises the ability of the association to create powerful outcomes for all members of its community.

As discussed earlier in this paper, awesome technology is the cornerstone of being able to undertake the transformational change necessary to survive the coming shifts. This shift is a global phenomenon and association should look both locally and internationally for solutions.

Associations must invest in technological solutions that will enable them to become a platform that enables strong communities to thrive.

This does not mean picking a technology vendor and trying to make your organisational operations fit the constraints of the technology. Instead it means:

- having a vision of what awesome technology means for your association
- documenting what those needs would look like in a practical sense
- undertaking a needs analysis that collates the requirements across your organisation (events, finance, membership, governance, volunteer management, community management, etc), and
- finding (or creating) a technology solution that will deliver exactly what you need – or at least one that will move you closer to the solution you are seeking to create

While you may not be able to achieve everything in one go, a solution that can enhance your ability to undertake the scale of transformation needed is a great first step.

OFFER

A powerful offering that delivers tangible value and meaningful outcomes for each key market segment.

Many associations struggle to articulate the true value of membership because the value of membership is generally intangible and challenging to explain. So, people default to speaking about the tangible aspects of the membership. Unfortunately, these are generally “features” of membership (E.g. websites, magazines, events) rather than actual benefits.

When looking at the value of membership, it is important to recognise that the prospective member is not donating to the organisation. They are making an investment and expect to see a return. You need to be able to articulate that return. Articulating value is a matter of explaining how the member will realise a successful return on their investment. You need to be able to state the outcome the member is expecting to realise and how you can help them achieve it. As different people desire different outcomes, it is important to understand which segment the person you are speaking to falls into, so you can be confident of the message they need to hear.

The kind of value a prospective or existing member expects can be broadly understood by the type of association they are joining.

- A business joins an industry association because they are expecting their membership to help make their business successful by increasing opportunities to generate business, reducing expenses, raising their profile, and other similar benefits.
- People join professional associations because they expect the association to provide them with tools to help fast track their way up the career and salary ladder. They are expecting to be provided with ways to increase their skills, raise their profile, and access career opportunities that aren't available to non-members.

People need to understand the outcome of their membership investment to make an informed purchase decision. So, when speaking about membership, it is important to talk in “outcomes”. E.g. As a member you will:

- Sell more products or services
- Reduce your costs.
- Have more time.
- Advance a cause you believe in.
- Proactively influence government policy – or support the associations to influence government policy.
- Engage with the most successful people in your industry or profession.

- Increase your profile within your industry.
- Gain new skills that will lead to career success.
- Gain critical information before others.
- Get the best possible start to your career/business.

The role of your association is to create opportunities for members to achieve the outcomes they are seeking. This may be through a mix of direct benefits (such as discounts, advice, and training) and indirect benefits (such as government lobbying).

It is also the role of the association to motivate its members to act to convert these opportunities into concrete benefits that will have a long-lasting, positive impact on their business or career.

To articulate the value of your association, consider the "success" your members are looking for and explain to them how you can assist them to achieve this. To extrapolate on just a couple of the examples above:

- **Engage with the most successful people in the industry** - The William E Smith Institute of Association Research undertook a study into the relationship between association membership, member income, and member job satisfaction. They found that, on average, people who are members of their association earn higher salaries, like their jobs more, and are happier people than those who do not join associations. They found that membership doesn't necessarily cause these benefits. Instead the relationship is the reverse - successful people are more likely to join an association. So, if you want to network with the most successful people, then you need to be a member.
- **To influence government policy / To have a strong voice at all levels of government** - One of the greatest benefits of membership is often not appreciated. When you get a large group of people together, they have a strong voice at all levels of government. Those members who are actively involved in the association can influence the content of that voice.
- **To increase your personal or business profile within the industry** - Members have numerous opportunities to increase their personal or business profile through speaking at conferences, writing articles, and otherwise engaging with the association community.
- **To gain critical information about the industry/ issue/ profession before others** - Associations serve an important role in the collection, filtering, and dissemination of relevant information. The more closely a member works with the association, particularly in board or committee positions, the more likely they are to gain important industry intelligence before most others.
- **To learn new skills** - Through getting involved with their association, members can learn skills on leadership, governance, etc that will assist them in other areas of their life.

- **To get the best possible first step into your career** - Being able to provide students and graduates with the guidance, tools, and connections to ensure they can move powerfully forward into their careers more easily makes your association more tangibly valuable to this hard to reach segment.

Third-party programs have become increasingly commoditised many are now ineffective.

Until recently, a mainstay of association member offerings was a large collection of third-party programs, such as discounts on theme parks, tyres, and stationery products. The internet has made it easy for members to find an even cheaper price via Google. This has seen many of these programs quickly lose their effectiveness and most of these programs are disappearing.

The exception is third party programs that provide an exceptional deal on an item that is a high cost for the majority of members (e.g.: insurance, fuel, energy, telecommunications). These programs thrive where:

- The deal is unavailable anywhere else
- It is only available for members while they are a member
- The partner is diligent about removing the benefit from the member should their membership lapse.

In this instance, third-party programs can be a significant benefit for member recruitment and retention.

Content curation is an often unappreciated yet essential part of the value proposition.

Powerful value can be created by pro-actively collecting information relevant to members and filtering that information into smaller streams of timely, critical, and considered insights that flow to the different individuals that require it (at the right time).

Many associations promote the fact that they provide members with information. However, members can take their question to Google and find 1 million search results.

This makes Google one of the biggest competitors to most associations. However, Google's strength is also its biggest weakness as users get many results with no guarantee of accuracy.

Many people are overwhelmed by the massive volume of information inundating them each day and few people have the time to keep on top of everything.

Time is more valuable than money. And many people would rather spend money than invest scarce time resources.

This provides an opportunity for associations to generate significant value for their members by becoming content curators.

BRAND

An engaging positioning and branding strategy that ensures the association is positioning itself in the hearts and minds of stakeholders in a compelling way.

Members don't join (or renew) for your products and services. They do so because of their perception (opinion) of your products and services.

Every time someone interacts with your association, they form an opinion about it (either subconsciously or consciously). You can't stop that process happening, but you can influence the opinion (or perception) created.

The challenge is that membership is intangible. It is not possible to touch, taste, smell or feel a membership. As a result, people can only form opinions from the intangible elements of membership, such as the promptness of response; the wording of your communications; how well your website works; their experiences at events; etc.

Positioning is the process of choosing how you want to be perceived (e.g. knowledgeable, fun, innovative), and branding is the way you create those perceptions (e.g. changing the way people answer the phone, your logo).

As a service-based organisation, it is vital to control your positioning and brand strategy. Or even mean creating a different positioning strategy and brand for different market segments.

For example, if you choose to position yourself as the foremost provider of expertise in your industry, you would develop ways of expressing that position. This could be through your mix of products, the way staff dress, and your customer service standards.

These combine to position your association in the minds of your target market. That is your brand.

A strong brand allows you to clearly differentiate yourself from competitors and define yourself in the marketplace by emphasising who you are and what you stand for. It enables you to clearly communicate your mission, increase your awareness and visibility, uniting people behind your cause, and promote loyalty amongst staff.

Brand strength can carry you in times of hardship. Consider the following comment by a Coca-Cola representative on their brand: "If all Coca-Cola's assets were destroyed overnight, whoever owned the Coca-Cola name could walk into a bank the next morning and get a loan to rebuild everything."

Associations need to focus on becoming a brand that your community want to align with.

COMMUNICATIONS

Engaging and targeted internal and external communications that ensure they cut through the clutter and have their voice clearly heard.

As a society we are highly connected and consume information voraciously through numerous online and offline channels. We want to be up to date with what's happening ... while it is happening.

If the information is interesting, relevant, and tailored we want to know it. However, we do not want to "be spammed" with every piece of news our association wants to get into the marketplace. We are drowning in a never-ending stream of communications that bombard us from all directions and if an association is continually sending irrelevant messages then we will stop listening.

The proliferation of communication channels and the fact associations are serving many different tribes – who all like to consume information differently – makes effective communication both a significant challenge and a key determinate of association success.

Associations must approach internal and external communication in a strategic manner that ensures they cut through the clutter and have their voice clearly heard. This means accepting that "sending an email" is not "effectively communicating a message". Instead, effective communication is understanding:

- the "action" you want your communication to inspire (e.g. register for an event)
- which individuals need to receive the communication for that action to happen
- which communication mediums and formats will get their attention (it may be more than one), and
- how to construct a message and offer that will inspire the recipient to take the action you want.

The internal and external communications strategy of associations must link to the goals within the organisational strategy plan.

Every communication issued, whether an e-bulletin, magazine, annual report, or recruitment campaign, must have a measurable purpose. For example, measuring the success of a social media campaign to generate delegates by the number of "clicks" is illogical. The success of the campaign should be measured by the number of delegates generated. "Click" numbers are secondary.

The effective use of traditional and modern media (aided by technology) is vitally important to managing and targeting communications successfully. Marketing experience and expertise inside associations is more crucial than ever to remain competitive.

ENGAGEMENT

Proactive facilitation of positive interactions and engagement between individuals within the association community.

Associations are no longer the providers of information. Instead they are the facilitators of meaningful interactions between members and their greater industry or professional community.

The best structure to facilitate these is one where the association do not act as a roadblock to members engaging with each other. Therefore, frameworks need to be put in place that make engagement easy and natural.

It is also important to establish within these structures mechanisms to ensure all members of the community feel safe against bullying and other forms of harassment (both online and offline).

Strong communities avoid becoming cliques by developing strong pathways into the community that engage newcomers quickly.

As powerful as a community is for engaging and retaining members, a clique can just as powerfully alienate your members. The difference between a clique and a community is simply the presence (or absence) of clear and welcoming pathways for a newcomer to become an active participant in the group.

Many associations do not realise they are unintentionally alienating new members. It's easy to find out how your association is doing. Just track your first-year retention rate and put it alongside your overall retention rate. The further apart those figures are, the more work you must do.

You won't be alone though. Many studies have shown the retention rate of first year members is lower than long term members across most associations.

For this reason, it is particularly important to have a specific new member integration process that proactively welcomes and engages new members.

This can be as simple as: a welcome email from the CEO, a welcome call designed to get the member engaged in the top three services for that segment, a new member kit also aimed at engaging them in those services, appointing a volunteer member to welcome new members at events, and tracking of new member engagement to identify those who need extra assistance.

Compelling ad-hoc volunteering opportunities are a great way to transition an uninvolved member to an involved member.

One of the most important strategies you can implement to move a member from being uninvolved to being actively involved is creating and promoting ad-hoc volunteering opportunities.

These short term or one-off opportunities for members to contribute to the association are a great way to enable new or unengaged members to "test out" participation.

Some ideas include asking members to:

- comment or post discussions on your online forums,
- attend events as Member Ambassadors to engage with new members to ensure they have a good time
- participate in your advocacy work
- speak at events, and
- write an article for your publication.

Associations can dramatically increase the strength of their volunteering programs by:

- creating engaging ad-hoc volunteering opportunities
- actively promoting that they exist
- providing adequate staff and financial support to activities utilising ad-hoc volunteers, and
- recognising volunteers for their work.

When promoting volunteering opportunities to members you can enhance the take-up rates by communicating:

- The value of the opportunity for the member (e.g. having your article published will raise your profile in the industry) and targeting specific opportunities at market segments you know will find them attractive.
- How the member will be contributing to a cause they believe in (e.g. by attending this forum you can address a significant issue that is about to affect you and your industry).
- The right opportunity to the right people. For example, you would not invite the CEO of your largest member to staff the registration desk at your event.

The symbiotic nature of membership and events makes a compelling, interesting, and fun events program an essential element of your community building strategy.

If people just wanted information, they would read a book (or Google it). When people register for an event, they are looking for more than just information. They are looking for an experience and an opportunity to connect meaningfully with others.

Events are a fantastic way to keep your members engaged and create enthusiasm about your association. Unfortunately, there are still some associations who have a compulsory weekly meeting made up of the same small

group of Baby Boomer members held in a musty old venue that starts with a rendition of God Save The Queen. Those are not the kind of events that will excite and attract younger generations (or even the not-so-younger generations).

There are many new, innovative learning formats that are proving popular. From ideas as simple as scattering chairs and tables (instead of putting them in rows) to running an entire conference without a program to “pitch fest” type activities.

The possibilities are limited only by your imagination.

Whatever you choose, it is important that event formats are tailored to the learning preferences of the delegates. Currently, there is a strong trend towards smaller group formats that enable discussion and sharing of insights. Venues need to be interesting, convenient, and practical.

Younger people are also trying to balance work and lifestyle so you may find they are multi-tasking – your association event may also be where your member will meet their life partner, next employer, tennis buddies, etc. Depending on your organisation there may be some opportunities for you to subtly facilitate these interactions.

Successful private social networks are an enormously powerful engagement tool. Unfortunately, most fail.

A successful online member community is a powerful tool for member recruitment and retention. However, most private social networks fail because they invest all their resources into the development of the system without realising that’s the easy part.

The most difficult part is getting members into the habit of using this system. That takes careful planning and a lot of member volunteers.

The goal of the launch of a private social network is to artificially create momentum until the network can self-generate the momentum required to be successful.

To artificially create momentum requires 70-100 ad-hoc volunteers whose role is to post content, or comment, in the private social network at least three times a week for three months.

Picking members with different ideologies can help create robust conversations that then create good content for your e-newsletter that drive people back into the network.

If you are considering a private social network for your organisation, do your research, pick the right vendor, and invest heavily into the launch and marketing to ensure it is successful.



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