

DIVERSIFYING YOUR TRADITIONAL OFFERINGS

Many associations are concerned about meeting the demanding and changing expectations of their members, as well as the needs of the organisation for financial sustainability in today's economic environment and volatile market. Today's landscape is changing and associations must constantly adjust their strategies.

Like companies, associations need to learn how to survive and thrive in new environments where competitive advantages come or go in waves. Those who are most likely to succeed in this new context will be those who catch each wave of advantage early, exploit it to the fullest but know then to shift to the next one before the current one dissipates. This capacity to flourish by capitalizing on powerful forces irrevocably reshaping our society will not only inspire current members but attract future ones.

Today, to remain relevant and vibrant, association leadership must think differently especially about the range of the association's programs and activities offered to its membership. With more and more individuals finding it difficult to justify and pay their membership dues, it becomes vital for associations and their stakeholders to find new ways to generate revenues.

Increasing association revenue takes a multiple "business" approach. Associations or professional societies very often practice in over ten distinct business fields such as education, professional development, the information business, publishing, public relations, government advocacy, networking business, community service, standards and certification business, conventions, exhibitions and research. Is this multiple business scenario offering the best solution? It could be that this makes some associations more vulnerable. There are now competitors that can offer the same with specialties in educational programs, trade shows, and providing networking options through social media - in some cases free of charge. This is why it is crucial to rethink the business model including but not only the delivered services. Products and services are well and good but no longer enough. People want solutions. It is about understanding and meeting members' needs.

HOW DO YOU ACCOMPLISH THIS?

More and more associations and PCOs must dedicate time to brainstorming and



planning. To deliver services to clients and partners, time needs to be set aside to do more research and seek advice, to evaluate different options, and to contact supporters for their opinion. A plan needs to include how to use technology to their advantage, market the programs and track the results. All this in the context of remembering the needs of the members and participants.

HOW TO DIVERSIFY THE TRADITIONAL OFFERS?

Undoubtedly, conferences are a proven and effective way to attract new members and raise the association's profile as well as that of the industry/profession they represent. Education and learning opportunities (and their cost) are their primary focus. But association education and learning opportunities are facing increased competition. With more low-cost or free options available, associations are starting to offer a diverse range of workshops to members to enhance their professional growth. These offerings include different topics from the more traditional areas of association programming like career planning, human resources and accounting.

Education today can have so many different formats such as short speaking formats like Ted talks that are personalized and adaptive learning processes delivering added value and a unique experience. Technology enables online webinars, live broadcasts for those who are unable to attend the meetings, awarding continuing education and credits

on-line providing additional revenue streams. Technology is also allowing new sponsorship opportunities and digital content that have an endless list of options, from pre-event interviews to highlights post events and feedback exchange systems via apps. Social Media, Twitter, direct e-marketing and web content can extend the dialogue between sponsors and delegates providing interaction, increasing the ROI and the value of the association's products.

Today, associations as well as PCOs must consider two different types of delegates, the traditional delegate as well as the "digi" delegate delivering tailored solutions and opening new opportunities and challenges to diversify the traditional offerings.

New sources of revenue for associations come from the ability to deliver information communicated in the way members increasingly prefer and with the capability to add value not possible through traditional delivery methods.

Innovation is a learning challenge. Are we questioning and appropriately discarding obsolete organisational models of success? Are we taking a creative risk in order to ride the wave of tomorrow's radical change ensuring our associations are relevant in the future and not just working for simple survival? It is time to step up and take associations to the next level.

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