

How to Position Your Association to the Next Level

For the International Association of Congress Organizers (IAPCO), **Barbara Calderwood**, Divisional Director Associations & Communities, MCI UK, identifies a few ways that will allow professional societies, non-profits and trade associations to perform better.

PRODUCTS

A crucial element of digital transformation is the ability to organize products. By bringing all available materials into one place, associations can simplify the way members access content. When you consider the entertainment content we access now, it's mainly on-demand, like television or music streaming.

When your audience is able to choose content on demand, the experience becomes more bespoke, where personalization and algorithms allow for the content to be shaped around them. But smart access to content doesn't have to end with your members...

ENGAGEMENT BEYOND THE MEMBERSHIP

Previously, I have worked with associations that have a lot of content to offer but are still struggling with engagement. Quite often, there is plenty of engagement among members, but there is still untapped opportunity among non-members. And that is where we have set our focus.

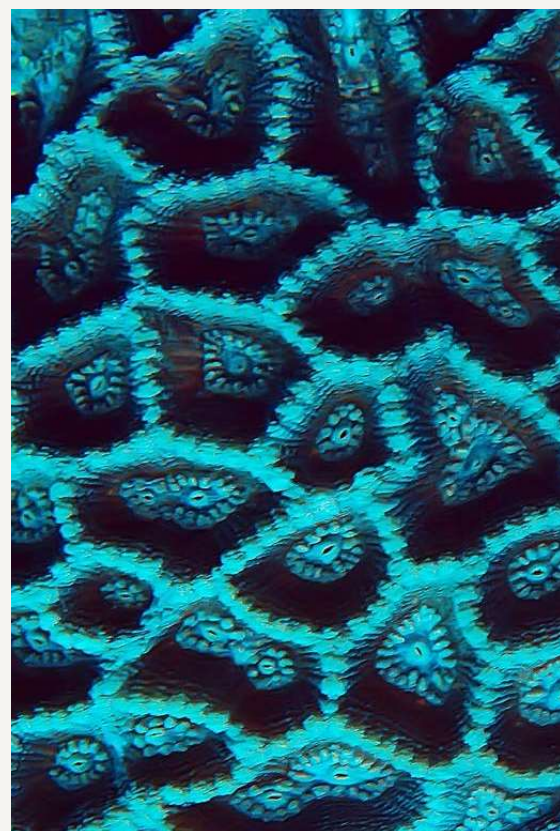
Educational materials are a valuable commodity for associations and their members. But there is an opportunity to boost the return on investment by making these materials available for others who are not yet members of this organization. This opportunity is twofold. Firstly, by giving non-members access to materials without the need to sign up, there could be a potential revenue stream which didn't exist before. Secondly, by gating certain pieces of content for members only, there is a chance that people could become members to access the rest of the work; a try before you buy-style positioning.

DIGITAL & ITS DISCONTENTS

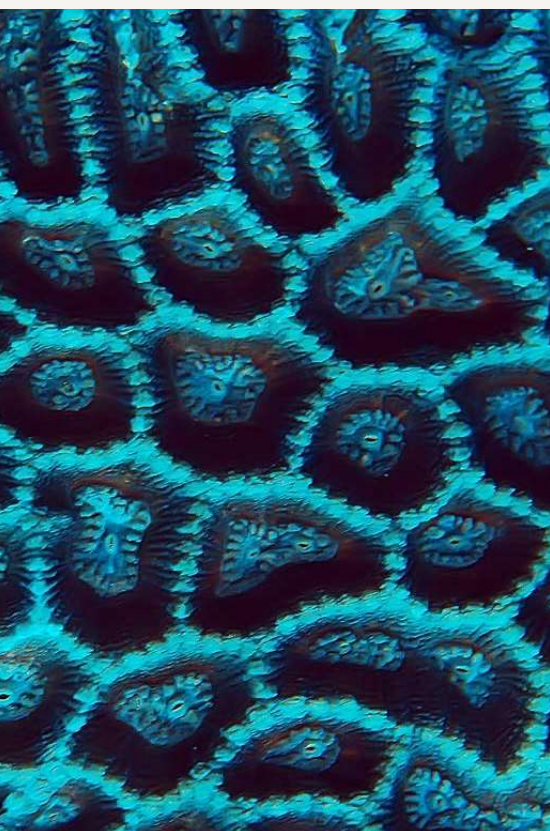
As we know, the pandemic shifted many associations over to the digital sphere to help maintain attendance, engagement, and of course revenue. This was entirely necessary and for some, it was a brand-new way of approaching meetings and events.

But there is one thing to bear in mind.

Digital transformation is not a bridge. Once you reach the other side, the journey



isn't over. The truth is, almost everybody went digital when the pandemic hit, and most of their lives (work, entertainment, shopping) were conducted through a screen. The consideration for associations is how you are going to engage with your audiences while keeping the very real issue of digital fatigue in mind.



JOINING FORCES

The pandemic proved a trying time for all organizations and put into sharp focus the robustness of business models and member engagement strategies. Traditional revenue sources have been tested and do not offer the same stability they once did. In crowded marketplaces, members, customers and sponsors will want the most value for their investment. Association staff have this enormous pressure to evolve their offering to ensure relevance.

The adage there is strength in numbers does bear weight in uncertain times. The stand-alone model, in which one association owns one space, specialty or niche, might be too limited. If you can no longer go it alone, why not look to other associations to collaborate, partner, or even merge?

There are numerous benefits in considering joining forces with similar like-minded organizations, institutions, and agencies. An integrated approach to bringing together the best minds from research, academia and industry can maximize opportunities in better advocacy, world-class training, economies of scale as well as transformative outcomes for your industry or profession.

Collaboration is key and achieving this balance means recognizing the strength derived from the diversity of participating organizations.

GROWING VIRTUALLY

There are many reasons why going virtual can bring benefits to associations, and the opportunity for growth is at the forefront. Previously, associations focused on one main conference to make space for networking, education, and member updates. But as we know, associations thrive on community, and a virtual community can offer audiences from around the world, with all the benefits that a worldwide community brings.

When considering global audiences, associations must always bring time zones into account and the way audiences engage with them. Once again, on-demand content and access is paramount to creating a relevant and fulfilling experience. When going virtual, consider how audiences outside of the current reach will interact with content.

Digital transformation is already bringing change and benefits to associations. When undergoing transformation, keep each of these points in mind, as they may be the elements which take your association's performance and positioning to the next level.

IAPCO represents today 138 companies comprised of over 9,900 professional congress organizers, meeting planners and managers of international and national congresses, conventions and special events from 40 countries. info@iapco.org / www.iapco.org.

