

Becoming Mindfeeders

As an association executive or meeting planner when was the last time you asked yourself: "how do your members feed their mind?"

Words Stephen Noble, Manager Asia Pacific, The Conference Company



In this fast moving world of content overload, there are more than 1.28bn global daily users on Facebook, 1mn global users on Instagram, 320mn monthly active users on Twitter, not to mention all the other digital and offline sources constantly feeding us with all sorts of information, everything from quirky pseudoscience 'facts' to inspirational quotes from the barrage of celebrity philosophy wannabes. Then there is the plethora of

actual educational material being made freely available on the web daily. So what role do associations play in this ever changing world of self improvement through education?

Over the past ten years, associations have evolved immensely: from being all about an 'annual meeting', they have now become a real community hub providing a very special opportunity to be the conduit that helps

drive the personal evolution of their members. Associations are well positioned to be a relevant source of education, especially with the rise of digital - they now have an opportunity to be content aggregators for their industry. A healthy membership thriving with industry experts, combined with the latest technology and the distribution to disseminate the best content out to those willing to receive: the associations that successfully

position themselves as the 'go to' provider of education and best practice will be those who thrive through the coming years.

CREATING NEURAL PATHWAYS

There are many different ways to educate oneself and consume information, both formally and informally, online and offline. Education is formed by the people you listen to, the opinions you believe, the books and blogs you read, the videos you watch, plus all the information that you take in today. Education relates to all aspects of life - the diet you maintain, how you take care of your body, mindfulness, stress reduction. These holistic topics are just as important as gaining technical knowledge and advancing within your field of expertise. Associations have long provided evidence-based learning helping members to achieve CME and CPD credits. They have an opportunity to capture their audience and keep their attention while embracing the holistic topics to provide an integrated service towards education.

The annual event, once reminiscent of a slightly dry piece of toast washed down with a lukewarm cup of tea, has now become a vibrant and thriving multiple-day experience full of not only the latest technological advancements in the industry but all the additional bells and whistles designed to enthrall the delegates and keep their attention through the business part of the day. We are all time poor and if the association can assist with a holistic learning approach they can become so much more valuable than simply formal education credits.

Imagine a world where delegates flock to association events and remain buzzed and engaged throughout the experience. Where they come away with not only truly valuable industry knowledge and contacts but also having learnt some interesting things that will help them in all areas of their lives. This

is the new nirvana of the association world and must be grasped in order to survive and thrive in these days of tougher competition and shrinking budgets.

WE ARE FAMILY

Being a member of an association creates credibility, networks, community, collaborative working, and career paths. Associations provide a wonderful opportunity for collaboration with complementary members working together to support each other. Examples can be found far and wide in the events industry where congress planners find local experts to assist when organising conferences in regions they haven't worked before. This brings many benefits for both organisations and additional economic benefit to local communities where meetings are held. International associations can connect their members with regional and national chapters to facilitate collaboration and vice versa.

TAILOR-MADE CONTENT

We are time poor and high maintenance, we need and want our content served up in bite sized, easily consumable and highly personalised packages. This is where associations truly can take the cake. With the highly detailed knowledge held on members, associations can provide a filter, creating a credible and reliable source for tailored online experiences.

With the advancement in technology digital platforms are able to support this experience. However, associations must be ready and equipped to take advantage of the automation age. There is additionally a generational issue to consider whereby some of the more mature members still hold loyalty to the association. However, the younger generations coming through are less inclined to simply join out of tradition or in the hope of making the right contacts for their career.

Associations must recognise the differing needs amongst its changing membership and ensure to meet all of those needs personally with relevance.

The digital age has made it a much harder proposition to draw millennials into membership so associations must work harder to prove their value and worth to this generation in order to continue to see the success of the past decade. One of the ways this can be done is through ensuring a truly personalised curated education program that is easy to access, available on the go and utilising the latest technology to ensure the experience is that of listening to an apple podcast on a smart phone at the gym or during their daily commute.

One of the digital issues associations need to consider is their own website as well as their conference sites. Ensure this reflects current technology, has all the social plugins, is fully mobile optimised and ranking on Google's harsh and ever changing algorithms. Navigation must be intuitive, load times lightening fast and all the SEO optimisation in place to ensure the right audience are driven to the website and once there served with relevant, engaging content. There is a case for bringing the conference website back to the main association website to maximise traffic rather than splitting off and rebuilding all the algorithm optimisation every year at additional cost.

This article was provided on behalf of the International Association of Professional Congress Organisers. IAPCO represents 117 companies comprised of professional congress organisers, meeting planners and managers of international and national congresses, conventions and special events from 41 countries.
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