

# Begin Again

## Associations Going Digital

According to **Louise Gorringe**, Director Association Management, Kenes Group, the events of the past twelve months have forced associations from viewing digitalization as a trend to recognizing it is as a necessity and enforcing it within a very short timeframe.

While the current situation has pushed many organizations into taking their first serious digital steps – in many cases moving an in-person meeting online – succeeding in transforming an association to be relevant online should be more than just a reaction – it must be a mindset. And a mindset which considers the whole association's mission and journey.

It is not about converting offline products and services to an online environment. In fact, a popular article on i-scoop.eu defines digital transformation as the acceleration of activities, processes, competencies and models to leverage the opportunities presented by technology and its impact in a strategic way. It's about value, people, optimization and the capability to rapidly adapt when needed. Being relevant digitally is about using the right tools for the right situation in support of the association's mission and goals, be it improving how the organization operates or increasing its value to members.

### WHAT BENEFITS CAN THE DIGITALIZATION PROCESS DELIVER?

**Reach** – an organization can achieve a larger mark digitally than if limited to the physical environment. Many organizations successfully moved courses, webinars, events etc., into a digital format where there are no location restrictions. For participants, there are lower costs associated with attending, allowing those from different segments to take part, such as young professionals or those from lower-income groups.

New tools including translation and captioning allow for a better understanding by a wider audience of the content itself. Marketing automation allows for tailored messages to different targets. AR and VR developments enable the live experience to be recreated better in a digital environment, opening the doors to safe and more practical simulation-based education.

**Connections** – while developments are still pending, technology is allowing peer-to-peer conversations without barriers, supporting co-creation through community platforms, live chats, or collaborative suites.

**Engagement** – both internally by supporting communication with the association's board and stakeholders through closed platforms and tools such as Teams, Slack etc., and externally, by increasing member engagement through AI and customized communication delivered in different formats.

**Data** – everything can be measured online, so delivering deep insights can aid the decision making of associations, and CRM systems can keep track of members, funders, partners and their behaviour.

**Automation** – simplifying processes for both the association and its members, providing efficiencies and protecting those all-important association resources can be done with mindful use of communication, social media, CRM and other tools or apps that can streamline workflows.

### WHERE TO START?

It may feel like a daunting task for associations to know where to start and so it is critical to:

**Develop a digitalization strategy** which should be interwoven with the wider association strategy.

**Take a stepped approach**, rolling changes in a planned way, using data and insight to evaluate outcomes and adapt along the way.

**Think long-term**, as what works now won't be relevant in a short space of time, requiring a review of how products and services are designed, developed and managed, but most importantly continuously evolved.

**Structure for success**. Growing an organization into its digital skin is fundamentally a disruptive process and requires a shift change in the way teams work and decisions are taken. Associations are not best known for their innovative style and embracing such a change may require a complete rethink of the internal mechanisms and culture.

In our work with medical and scientific societies, the first step of many was to move their education offer online, which is a central part of any association's mission. Healthcare providers face an increasingly complex array of pressures, with one of the top being lifelong learning and maintaining their expertise. Due, however, to the lack of time that everyone experiences today, and with the current difficulties to meet face-to-face, online education is simply crucial.

Social media gave the kick to the online life of many organizations, creating a ripple effect, such as extending the timeframe of engagement after an event to a continuous year-round conversation. The digital world compliments the impact and effectiveness of face-to-face events and, especially in a time where such a contact suddenly became obsolete, online came to the rescue in order for science to continue.

For an association to be relevant online, the board must provide quality content, deliver it by using the right technology and wrap it all up with a strategy to engage the community throughout the year.

Because if content was always the king, the delivery is the new reigning queen, then the community is the kingdom.

This article was provided by the International Association of Professional Congress Organisers, author Louise Gorringe, Director Association Management Operations, Kenes Group ([www.kenes.com](http://www.kenes.com)). IAPCO represents today 137 companies comprised of over 9900 professional congress organisers, meeting planners and managers of international and national congresses, conventions and special events from 40 countries [info@iapco.org](mailto:info@iapco.org) \ [www.iapco.org](http://www.iapco.org)

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