

External Help

An Association TRENDS special focus on consultants

Personalize

Members want ease, not anonymity

By Scott Oser, president, Scott Oser Associates, North Potomac, MD

ASK YOURSELF THESE FIVE QUESTIONS before reading this article:

Do you:

1. Respond equally to every medium that companies use to get your attention?
2. Value the organizations that treat you simply like a dollar in their pockets and not an actual person?

3. Respond the first time an organization you have a relationship with asks you to do something?

4. Like to sift through a laundry list of products and services just to find out that many of them are not even appropriate to you as an individual?

5. Enjoy having to take the time to fill out completely blank order forms that are sent with envelopes that do not include postage so that you have to do all of the work from scratch and pay to send in your order?

Did you answer no to each of them? If you did you are not out of the ordinary. People – your members – prefer to deal with organizations that make it easy for them to be members and that show them they are valued as members and individuals in each and every marketing piece. Do you agree? I assume that you do and that is why I am very surprised by how many assns I come in contact with that:

1. Only communicate with members when they want them to renew their membership, buy something, or sign up for a committee.
2. Only communicate with members using one form of media. This used to be direct mail but now assns are turning to e-mail as the main form of communication because it's so inexpensive.
3. Send the same information to all audi-

ences regardless of the fact that their constituents have different needs and the organization potentially knows what they are.

4. Send out direct response vehicles that include order forms that do not have anything pre-populated even though the assn has that data in the database.

5. Send one or two requests for something and then never follow up again.

If you are doing any of these, you can learn a lesson or two from these tactics taken from a number of successful assns:

1. Develop a plan to communicate with your members "365 days per year." Not literally, but put together a plan to talk to members regularly, not just when you need them to act on something. This might sound overwhelming but if Tech Council of Maryland, a regional assn, can do it with only one person fully dedicated to membership, you can figure out a way to make it happen.

2. Mix up your media during the promotion of any one activity or product and also throughout the year like the Hearth, Patio and Barbecue Assn did in a recent new member campaign. Not all individuals respond to one medium; develop a strategy that mixes direct mail, e-mail, phone, fax and, if it makes sense for your organization, face-to-face visits.

3. Use your data to speak to your members, prospects, customers and potential

customers through promotions that are targeted to them and only them. Obviously, this is not 100% achievable but when the National Assn of Gifted Children determined their key audiences and used their data and variable data technology, they found that they could tell individual members about the things that mattered to them, not the things that would matter to other audiences.

4. Increase the number of times you contact a member to renew. SOCAP International implemented a new retention strategy where their first contact was 120 days before the member's expire date. The first renewal effort was via phone and was more of a check-in call but there was an ask for renewal on that call and some members did renew at that time.

5. Pre-populate your order forms with as much information as possible as often as possible. In its first direct-mail new member recruitment campaign in a number of years, the Alliance of Hazardous Materials Professionals used a technique that allowed all order forms to include prospective members' contact information as well as their member categories and dues amounts. All the recipient needed to do was fill in a credit card number or include a check and fax or mail in the form and payment.

Some of these solutions may not look like they are applicable to your organization – we all know every assn is "different" – or able to be implemented by you. Take these ideas, or other best practices, figure out what is required to implement them and tweak the ideas and processes to implement them at your assn. Then you look at your marketing efforts from the members perspective you won't be asking your members to do things that you said you wouldn't do when you answered the questions at the start of this article!

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Beyond the early bird discount

4 ideas to increase
early event registration

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EVENT PROMOTERS HAVE USED early-bird registration discounts for decades in order to increase advance registration. This is critical for cash-flow and to estimate ultimate head count at the program. Lately, the early-bird discount has lost its power; people are signing up at the last minute. One recent event had 80% of the registrants sign up in the two weeks just before the meeting!

The same old worms are not working for many early birds. Heavy late registration, while better than nothing, clearly creates significant challenges and stress for planners.

Proactive event executives will look for new means to increase the proportion of highly valuable early registration. To that end, I offer four ideas on increasing early registration that go beyond simply offering a discount:

1. Make it insanely easy to register. Today, the vast majority of event registrations occur online. You want to make those online registration processes as easy and streamlined as possible. Avoid giving people any opportunity to reconsider the investment during the registration process. Usability testing and statistical analysis can provide a dramatic payoff in increased registrations.

2. Target past early registrants. Properly maintained registration data can tell you who among your past participants registered early. Pull these folks out first and market to them with your early registration efforts. While it's no guarantee, people who