
Tips for Growing Your Membership – Part III: Steps for Successfully Engaging Your Members

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If your organization isn't growing it will become irrelevant and fade away. The key to remember is that members trust those organizations that provide unique, compelling, relevant, and practical products and services.

You can apply the same rule to individuals as well: stop growing and you will become less valuable to your employer, profession, community, and the world you live in.

Your organization can measure engagement in revenue, satisfaction, participation, idea generation, retention, or in how many are willing to personally pay to join or remain a member versus having their employer do so.

The Center for Association Resources, Inc. has a bias for action and recognizes that organizations rely heavily on both marketing and technology to advance their mission. Our senior staff is skilled and experienced in these areas and we create plans for clients that produce expected results. These plans are rooted in Next Generation Six Sigma which calls for:

- Beginning with a strategic alignment
- Mobilizing with a method
- Accelerating to maintain momentum
- Governing to gain results



Better communication and demonstrated improved member value are the most common drivers of increased member retention. Some popular tactics include:

- Heightened visibility with a focus on member value
- An increase in local events and more member engagement
- Sound relationships with sections, chapters and regions
- Increased brand awareness
- Engagement with new professionals in their initial two years of practice
- Targeted marketing and communications efforts
- More consistent follow-up by membership staff
- Telephone calls with key contacts
- Increased touch points and personalized mailings
- Increasing the value/relevancy proposition

- Connecting with members throughout the year
- Improved web visibility
- Increased member-only benefits
- Deploying technology in new ways to retain and increase membership

Member engagement is better measured by the way your members make use of their participation experiences to achieve their professional/personal goals. The more purposeful their interaction is, the higher its value, the higher the perceived value, the greater the level of their engagement and satisfaction!

The most successful organizations included the following in designing their member experiences:

- Focus on unmet member needs first, not new ideas
- Engage methods that leverage member empathy (*create an emotional context*)
- Focus on the member's journey and not your interpretation of their journey
- Identify and leverage both organization and member moments of truth
- Rapid product and service response to member wants and needs
- Encourage open innovation of product and service – always include the member
- Develop a unique value network of influencers and resources (*broaden your perspective*)
- Promote evidence of your brand's attributes
- Use storytelling to convey your brand's attributes, value, and the member experience

Members Choose to Participate in Different Ways

Most of your members will choose to participate differently than those fully engaged with the organization giving their time freely in support of your goals. The classic adoption curve shows the majority will engage only after a tipping point occurs. Therefore, it is critical to develop member engagements that create diverse tipping points for your members. Here are some steps to consider in building member engagement:

1. Encourage your members to recruit one new member a year.
2. Provide your members with recruitment tools.
3. Direct your members to encourage their prospect to attend the upcoming annual meeting, convention, etc.
4. Encourage your members to become "mentors" for their new member prospects.
5. Identify the primary reason each new member joined the organization, invite them to participate on the committee that best matches their interest. Attempt to learn of all referral sources.
6. Encourage new members to complete a Relationship Value Update every quarter for the first year and yearly after that. The update should ask three simple questions:
 - *What value are you receiving from your membership?*

- *What value do you believe you are delivering to the organization?*
 - *How can we deliver even more value to you?*
7. Disseminate the results of the Relationship Value Update to the membership committee, Board of Directors, and involved staff.
 8. Keeping your members engaged over the long-term. *Do not assume that your long-standing members no longer need to receive value. Members at every stage of their membership lifecycle need to receive value from their membership.*
 9. Be responsible and prudent financial stewards. *Showing financial health will go a long way in fostering continued member trust and engagement.*
 10. Encourage and facilitate member driven communities based on reciprocity and shared interests. *Member developed communities will continually engage your members. They deliver high-levels of value for time spent and are essential for retaining and attracting member engagement.*

The key is to determine what members want versus that for which they are willing to pay. Some guidelines in this regard are asked with the following questions:

1. Can your organization deliver traditional services in a new way?
2. Can your organization deliver member benefits 24/7?
3. Does your organization have the ability to keep members informed of breaking developments and also do you offer members informational resources and tools?
4. Does your organization consistently deliver a higher level of services that are more personal such as assistance with unique problems or industry/professional expertise?
5. Does your organization price your membership offerings *just right*, to grow the number of members who would likely participate?

The bottom line is to be relevant to the people who are willing to spend money on member dues and create an environment where the members feel that they *must* belong!

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