

white space

Through our experience we've learned that if you want to do something well, you have to know something about it. We would like to share some of what we have learned with you. Our newsletter is where you'll find marketing and visual communications topics related to retaining, communicating with and growing your organization's

Retention is Key During a Recession

Associations from various industries are concerned about how their organization will be affected by the current economic environment. Association executives have legitimate concerns about members being forced to decide whether or not to continue their membership if they lose the benefit of having their employer pay the dues. Combine that with predictions of declining non-dues revenue and member involvement this year, and it's clear to see that associations need to prepare to move forward during the recession.

A key ingredient for success during the recession will be for associations to be more strategic about membership retention. This will not be a year when associations can rely solely on traditional methods for maintaining or improving membership retention, instead leaders must think outside the box and use innovative ways of reaching their members.

FOUR INNOVATIVE WAYS TO MAINTAIN RETENTION DURING A RECESSION

1. Support members during recession.
2. Diversify communication with members.
3. Increase membership value.
4. Obtain and utilize member feedback.

1. Support members during recession.

A recession can prove to be difficult for any business or association, but it is also a time when professionals are worried about their financial security. Providing additional resources to your members to help them weather the recession will put their membership on the list of items that survive budget cuts.

A creative way to assist members during a recession is to decrease their cost of participating in association activities. For example, if some of your members can not afford to travel for meetings and seminars you can still involve them.

- Put keynote speakers on podcasts
- Turn break-out groups into webinars
- Encourage attendees to use Twitter and Flickr to document their experience

Members can also benefit from educational support and networking opportunities tailored to the struggles of the economic environment. Providing networking opportunities may not be your expertise, but it is a great opportunity to connect with your members and let them know you understand what they are going through.



white space

Through our experience we've learned that if you want to do something well, you have to know something about it. We would like to share some of what we have learned with you. Our newsletter is where you'll find marketing and visual communications topics related to retaining, communicating with and growing your organization's

2. Diversify communication with members.

A healthy economy often includes more forgiveness for haphazard and limited communication. But, in times as these every message must be powered by a results-driven plan of how it will reach and be received by the member.

Traditionally, associations prefer to communicate with their members in ways that are comfortable for the association staff and board members, but those methods may not be the best means of delivering information to members. Associations must closely examine how they are communicating with members and look for areas to improve or diversify. Expanding your resources can strengthen the delivery of your message.

- Monthly e-newsletters on industry trends
- Podcasts giving details of upcoming events
- Give a sneak peak of next month's magazine through a webinar/podcast
- Twitter your annual conference
- Regularly update your blog with association news (develop a content strategy)

Also, by diversifying means of communication, your association can easily increase the frequency of communicating with members. The combination of using more meaningful, diverse means of communication and increasing the number of contacts with members will strengthen your impact and impression, which will encourage members to renew.

3. Increase membership value.

Every household in America examining their budget is weighing the value and benefit of the expenses they have placed on the chopping block. Associations can not ignore this fact, and must attempt to increase the value of membership to their current members.

One of the quick and easy ways to increase value is to have long-standing members share testimonials of the benefits they've received through their membership. Collecting a variety of members of different backgrounds and involvement in the association is a great way to start. This is an innovative way to also educate new members on how to effectively take advantage of their membership, or remind them of the reasons why they joined your association.

Other strategies include increasing member-only benefits and making benefits more accessible and valuable. Each of these ideas present the challenge of bridging strategy with creative, but if done correctly, can add great value for your members:

- Market conferences based on worth/value and benefit, not conference location
- Add exclusive member-only webinars to your website
- Have key staff create private blogs that can only be viewed by members

white space

Through our experience we've learned that if you want to do something well, you have to know something about it. We would like to share some of what we have learned with you. Our newsletter is where you'll find marketing and visual communications topics related to retaining, communicating with and growing your organization's

4. Obtain and utilize member feedback.

What is the most effective way to correctly identify what your members want? Ask them.

People like to share their opinion, and they like it even more when they think someone is listening to them. Give your members opportunities to have a voice by using polls, surveys and forums. This will make members feel more involved in the association, but will also give you a chance to learn about their needs. For this strategy to be most effective, it is ideal to have key staff members respond to member feedback. Also, the association must be committed to identifying member interests, needs or services that they can easily provide.

An uncertain economic environment can be stressful for associations, but it is not the end of the world. Opportunities are to be had, and successes to be achieved this year. But, only if you expand beyond traditional strategies and embrace innovative means of improving basic operations. Take the leap to learn about and utilize social media. Think out of the box and create a conference brand mark that portrays the value of the conference, not the location. Focus on the core of what makes you strong, such as member retention, and step outside of your comfort zone to master new approaches of reaching your goals while weathering a recession.

