

## 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

### Dos & Don'ts of Conference Marketing

#### How to increase conference attendance.

For associations of various sizes and missions, conference attendance has been down and many association executives are feverishly looking for new ways to increase attendance. We believe the key to this may lie in conference marketing that effectively emphasizes conference value, instead of, let's say, conference venue.

We recently participated in a webinar about membership retention that opened our eyes to a possible weakness, or a possible opportunity, for growth. In this webinar we learned that **members who attend the annual meeting are 20% more likely to renew their membership** compared to members who did not attend. In the same webinar, we learned that **members who make a purchase (publication or product) from a website are 30% more likely to renew their membership** than members who do not make a purchase.

#### Is it just us, or should these statistics be reversed?

Annual conferences are huge events packed with informational key speakers, dynamic learning experiences and great networking opportunities for members. Why are members not making the connection of conference value to membership renewal as strongly as they do with purchasing a publication/product?

It all starts with developing a conference marketing plan that showcases the value of the event. Communicating the value will result in higher attendance, and also increase an attendee's perceived value of their membership. **But, how do you do that? (Hint: keep reading.)**



## 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

### CONFERENCE THEME

One of the first, and most important, steps in marketing your next conference is deciding on a conference theme. Wise planners can see that this is more than coming up with a catchy slogan and a logo; instead, it's a challenge to pack the value of your conference into one statement, image and strategy.

### Don'ts:

1. All too often we see associations create a conference brandmark based on the event venue. If the most compelling aspect of the conference is the location, then maybe you should just encourage your members to take a vacation there. But, if there is value to your conference other than the city in which you're gathering, then you must convey that to your members at every chance possible - especially with the conference brandmark.
2. Relying on what's worked in the past is not the way to inspire newer, younger members. Challenge yourself to learn more about them and how your conference theme and brandmark can inspire the younger members.

### Dos:

1. **Create a short, powerful, inspiring statement that captures the conference value for members.** Use these 6-12 words to bridge the gap between strategy and creative as you develop the conference brandmark. Revisit this value statement in every single step of marketing your conference.
2. **Create a conference brandmark that is versatile enough to be used over various mediums.**

## 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

### PRE-CONFERENCE MATERIALS

After creating a dynamic brandmark that communicates the true value of your conference, put it to use with pre-conference materials. Each eye-catching piece that falls in this category has great potential for effectively inspiring potential attendees to register for the conference; but without proper strategy, each piece also has the potential to quickly hit the trashcan.

#### Don'ts:

1. Bombarding potential attendees with multiple, ineffective direct mail pieces guarantees that you will become junk mail that goes straight from the mailbox to the recycling bin. This can easily be avoided by segmenting the recipients and targeting them with tailored messages, following a strategic schedule.
2. Email marketing is a great way to inform potential attendees about conference events; however, misguided attempts that flood inboxes with generic, one-size-fits-all messages will turn away potential attendees instead of catching their attention.
3. Trying to utilize all of your favorite images, fonts, colors, quotes into each pre-conference piece will turn into a huge mess that confuses your target audience.

#### Dos:

1. Several months before the event, **send out a Save the Date postcard or email with a strong message** about the conference value that inspires the recipient to want to know more about the event.
2. **Segment the recipients of all pre-conference marketing pieces into groups** based upon their interests; create and send personalized, targeted messages to each group. This is much more effective than sending a generic message to everyone.
3. **Follow these basic rules for email marketing:**
  - Use a template that reflects your conference brandmark
  - Create a subject line that entices readers
  - Make the most of the preview pane
  - Design each email to be easy on the eyes - looks good and is easy to read
  - Ensure that the message shows up, even if images don't
  - Give it a personal touch with testimonials from last year's attendees
  - For the best success, send it out on a Tuesday morning
4. Make **PDFs of your exhibitor prospective, ad spec, and exhibitors' hall sign-up** that can be downloaded from your website, or sent via email.
5. **Connect strategy and creative for a smooth message** by giving the conference registration website the same look and feel as all marketing materials.
6. **Explore ways to use social media during your conference** and get it set up before hand. For example, encourage attendees to Twitter their conference experience, or share photos on Flickr. Set up the searchable tags or groups so that all the content can be easily found.



## 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

### POST-CONFERENCE

Post-conference communication is a great way to gather information that may help with planning next year's conference. It's also an opportunity to help members recap their experience and see the value of attending...it will also build excitement for next year's event.

#### Don'ts:

1. There are two extremes of post-conference communication; saying nothing, and overwhelming attendees with a parade of post-conference emails. Falling into either extreme can decrease the attendee's perceived value of the experience.

#### Dos:

1. **Keep attendees engaged after the conference by posting podcasts** of the keynote speakers or converting the best of breakout groups into webinars.
2. **Continue the conversations by giving attendees a place to ask questions**, share their experiences and compare notes. This can easily be done through Twitter, a forum, or your blog.
3. **Ask for feedback by emailing attendees** a short, easy-to-use questionnaire that carries the same brandmark as all other conference materials.

Making a mission-based strategy come alive in creative marketing is a stumbling block for many associations, which is supported by the fact that every week we see conference brandmarks with the image of Seattle, Chicago or New York. If you still think your conference brandmark should be an image of your venue's city skyline, be sure to include a list of nearby attractions and info on the tourist center - **maybe that will entice your members to register for your conference, or at least take a vacation there.**

