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INDUSTRY TRENDS
**NONPROFIT IS A
TAX STATUS, NOT A GOAL**

Nonprofit is a Tax Status, Not a Goal

Written by Kathie Pugaczewski, CAE, CMP

Shrinking and stagnant membership, increasing reliance on conference revenues to support operations and fierce competition for time and attention of our customers (members) is the environment associations are operating in everyday. We need to stop hitting the snooze alarm and this should be our final wake up call. The days of automatic loyalty and membership renewals have moved on and it's time for us move on rapidly to a sustainable business model that generates both value and revenue. Our value proposition and how we communicate it has never been more critical to our existence.

After all, we are businesses and need to operate as such - nonprofit is a tax status, not a goal. We need a razor sharp focus on what creates value and relevance, again and again, while generating revenue to create a sustainable business model to be able to serve our customers 10 years from now. We need to look at other for profit models of innovation and efficiency and model our business in the same manner, albeit scaled back.

The Nature of Associations

Associations have more access to the same tools as large businesses as never before. And the nature of our associations to gather and connect people in the same profession with similar needs puts us in a competitive advantage to focus our efforts on collaboration and connection, in person and online. It's part of our fabric, our history, and our future. With a focus on strategic use of technology to streamline processes, communicate through different tools with good design to capture attention is all within our reach.

With technology evolving in the past few years, our websites have gone from online brochures to integrated databases that we can mine to develop our offerings, connect our members by specialty and areas of interest and create real value that engages thought leaders in a variety of professions.

Our websites are now highly transactional and data-focused nature with the ability to join online, event registration, credit card transactions, member login, member demographics, searchable directories, job board, etc. and more.

Getting Them To Come Back

In addition to the transactional and operational nature of our website platform, we need to now focus on content development and engagement strategies to get our members to come back again and again.

That's where the human resource part becomes critical. We need to tap into our members – our subject matter experts to be the key driver of our content strategy. There are a variety of tools to increase the engagement and content development including RSS feeds – pulling them as well as becoming own RSS feed to send information out. Our front pages need to capture the attention quickly though clear and crisp design and navigation for ease of use. We need to push out and pull back in through the rich content that is housed in our members' minds.

We need to offer diversified offerings including young professional groups, mentoring, and higher-level offerings for peers that have been in their profession for years and don't need 101 level courses and content.

We need to offer easy and short-term ways to engage – in person and electronically and define what to they get by investing their time in our associations.

By strategically using multiple communication methods including email, webinars, podcasts, video, mobile apps, RSS feeds, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, blogs, get conversations started and going. It's now a conversation, not a lecture.

About the Author

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