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INDUSTRY TRENDS  
**IS YOUR DATABASE HELPING YOU  
ACCOMPLISH YOUR MISSION?**

# Is Your Database Helping You Accomplish Your Mission?

Written by Wes Trochilil

At first blush, it seems like an odd question. How can your database help achieve your organization's mission? But it's not as far-fetched as you might think, and some of my best clients are using their databases to advance their organization's mission. Here are just three examples of how associations and non-profits can use their databases and data to achieve their mission:

## Improving volunteer management

Let's face it, the single aspect of operations that separates for-profits from non-profits is volunteerism. How many times have you volunteered to work for Best Buy or Wal-Mart? Yet you have hundreds, if not thousands, of willing volunteers donating thousands of hours to your organization every year. Given that, can you easily answer, who are my best volunteers? Most organizations cannot, because they're not systematically tracking who is volunteering where.

Today's association management systems allow us to track essentially any type of data, so from a technology perspective, there's no excuse. The problem is in the process. Most organizations have not systematized the process of collecting and managing volunteer data.

Think for a moment about the different avenues of volunteer management that your organization provides: committee and task force volunteers, speakers, writers, bloggers, room monitors, editors, and so on. Now ask yourself "When I look at a member's record in the database, can I easily see (or report on) ALL of the volunteer activity the member is engaged in?" There's no technical reason you can't track all that information in your central AMS. Ask yourself why you're not doing that.

## Increasing revenue and reducing marketing expenses

As the old saying goes, "non-profit" is a tax status, not a business model. You can't achieve your mission if you can't stay in business, and staying in business means some level of revenue is required. Most association and non-profits could easily increase revenue and reduce marketing expenses by using their existing data more wisely.

What I see too often among my clients is a shotgun approach to marketing. The thinking is that every member is interested in everything we do, so therefore we should tell them everything we're doing. Or the converse: If I don't include every member on every marketing promotion, I may end up missing someone who might have bought from us.

But the reality is, although it may be counterintuitive, that the fewer people you market to, the more effective your marketing will be. Lower marketing costs and higher revenues are possible, assuming you are targeting your market appropriately. 100 emails sent to a highly interested group of recipients will far outperform 1000 emails sent to a random group of recipients. You can use your data to learn what interests your members and customers. And then you can target your message to those who are most interested.

## Systemizing collection of data from members and customers

Every day your staff is interacting with your members and customers, whether that's through email, on the phone, or even in-person. And every day your staff is collecting key data that could be used to improve your communications, allow you to better target your markets, and even help create new products and services.

What I'm referring to is those conversations where a member or customer says something like "It would be helpful if you could..." or "You know what's really missing from our market is a product that would..." or "I'd be very interested in learning more about..."

These nuggets are free market research that staff hears every day. But it is likely that the information your staff is collecting is not getting back in to your database where it can be analyzed and used.

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For example, how often do we ask the question “What is top of mind for our members and customers right now? What are their greatest concerns?” If you had been systematically collecting the interactions outlined above, you would have a trove of empirical data to answer the question.

## Use the database to advance your mission

Too many organizations view the database as a repository for transactional data; who has joined, who has dropped, who is attending a meeting, and so on. But by viewing the database and its data as a strategic asset, you can leverage the data and use it for advancing your organization’s mission.

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## About the Author

For more than 20 years, Wes Trochlil has worked in and with dozens of associations and membership organizations providing a range of consulting services, from general consulting on data management issues to full-scale, association-wide selection and implementation of association management systems. Follow Wes on Twitter @westrochlil. His website is [www.effectivedatabase.com](http://www.effectivedatabase.com)

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