

**Discovery Conference 2008**

# **Why People Join and Remain Members of Associations**

**A Review of ASAE's Decision To Join  
Research Project**

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# Background

From a group of 18 individual membership bodies a group was created comprising people who:

- are current members of an association,
- are former members of an association, and
- who have never joined any association.

What is significant about this study is the addition the group who have never joined any association. With 16,944 responses this study created a vast amount of data.

# Perception of Value

The perception of value increases with the level of involvement of a member - generally associations have focused on communicating the dollar value benefit that people receive in exchange for the dollars they pay. However the decision to join is not a traditional cost-benefit analysis. They found that the perception of the value of an association increases with the level of involvement.

# Retention

Long term members are more likely to be retained as they have a higher perception of value - This explains why it is common to find the greatest member drop off in first and second year members. This indicates that prospective and new members need to be educated on the nature and value of associations.

# Ad-Hoc Volunteers

*“If former members are thought of as being dead, the uninvolved are close to comatose”.*

**Ad-Hoc Volunteers are an important segue between involved and un-involved members** - they are much more likely to renew than un-involved members. They are an a distinct segment who are not yet fully engaged with the common good concept but are engaged with the organisation. They place higher importance on networking and a lower importance on legislative and regulatory activities.

# Perception & Boards

**Board perceptions do not reflect those of the overall membership** - the perception of value rises to a point where those who govern are no longer in sync with the perceptions of the majority of the membership (who are not as involved). Therefore it is vital that elected leaders are aware of this as and appreciate the need to research member opinions and perceptions rather than to rely on their own.

# Retention Rates

Your retention rate is only half as bad as you **believe it is** - more than half of those people who dropped their membership indicated that they did so for reasons other than the performance of the association – such as career and life changes. This means that, in general, your loss rate is only a half as bad as you thought it was.

# Academics

## **Academics may be an overlooked opportunity**

- In many associations academics are an underappreciated resource. They are the least apt to drop their membership, more likely to join, more likely to promote the organisation and often have access to entry level people who are slow to join associations. They are among the strongest association supporters. They are a segment that, for many associations, would be worth exploring further.

# Referrals

**Referrals are an essential marketing tool -** 34.1% of people first learnt about the association via a colleague or co-worker. The implications on this for marketing membership are immense. The power of personal referral should be harnessed where necessary and the reputation of the association protected.

# Accessing Younger People

To access younger people you need to focus on what's important to them - association leaders gave low importance rankings to benefits that young people rated as most important. Also, young people gave associations poor performance ratings on those benefits while leaders indicated that performance is on par with the level of importance. This may explain the difficulties that many organisations have experienced in recruiting and retaining younger members.

# Accessing Younger People

**Younger people are joining later** - Young people have always been slow to appreciate the value that associations offer until their career pursuits settle in as they reach their late 20s.).

# Accessing Younger People

## Young people don't join associations anymore!

Young workers show every indication of joining associations at even higher rates than the Baby Boomers, more than making up for their slightly smaller numbers. The supposed behavioral differences between the generations that is suppressing Generation X association membership turns out to be a function of age, not generation. As Generation Xers move into their peak professional years, they show every indication of joining associations at even higher rates than the Baby Boomers. The bottom line is that fear over the effects of Generation X and Millennials on association membership is not warranted.”

*William E. Smith Institute for Association Research*



# Accessing Younger People

Younger people have four key benefits they are looking for - to improve the appeal of an association to younger generations the following four benefits need to be strengthened:

- Access to the most up-to-date info in the field
- Professional development & education
- Access to career information & job opportunities
- Opportunities to network with other professionals in the field

# Segmentation

**Career cycle is one of the most effective segmentation methods** - When constructing your value proposition it is more useful to align member needs against stages in career development than generational stereotypes (for professional and industry bodies).

# Employer Paid Fees

**No variation in value perception when others paying** - - when employers pay for fees, the members are (unsurprisingly) more likely to retain their membership. However, more surprisingly, there was very little difference in the perception of value between those who paid their membership themselves and those who had their membership paid for them. With the increasing emphasis on educating their workforce and demonstrate social responsibility there is an opportunity for associations to become better at making the “employer sale”.



# Questions?

If you would like to subscribe to Belinda's free monthly email bulletin please email hand in your business card, call 0413 190 197 or email [Belinda@membershipsolutions.net.au](mailto:Belinda@membershipsolutions.net.au).

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