

Navigating the Future: Transformative Trends in Professional Associations

Associations, catering to diverse interests from business to hobbies, have traditionally been hubs for idea exchange, networking, and knowledge sharing. Yet, in a rapidly changing world, they are now embracing digital technologies, online communities, and innovative retention strategies to enhance member experiences and remain relevant. Leading associations are distinguishing themselves by delivering exceptional value and fostering lasting loyalty in this dynamic, interconnected landscape.

This white paper delves into transformative trends shaping the future of professional associations, emphasizing evolving membership preferences and innovative engagement strategies. Leaders are navigating member retention and growth challenges. Insights drawn from academic papers, articles, and national association comparisons lead to key findings regarding the critical nature of the first 90 days in a member's journey, the impact of shifting demographics, the balance between in-person and digital interactions, and the effectiveness of online communities and gamification in boosting engagement.

MEMBER NEEDS BECOME SYMBIOTIC

While the primary benefit of an association often revolves around advocacy and representation, there are several other crucial advantages that influence the decision to join, renew, or stay with them.

Members prioritize the availability of educational resources, workshops, and training programs as a crucial factor in their ongoing skill development and staying informed about industry trends. Professional associations often offer opportunities for members to achieve certifications, thereby boosting their qualifications and marketability in their respective fields.

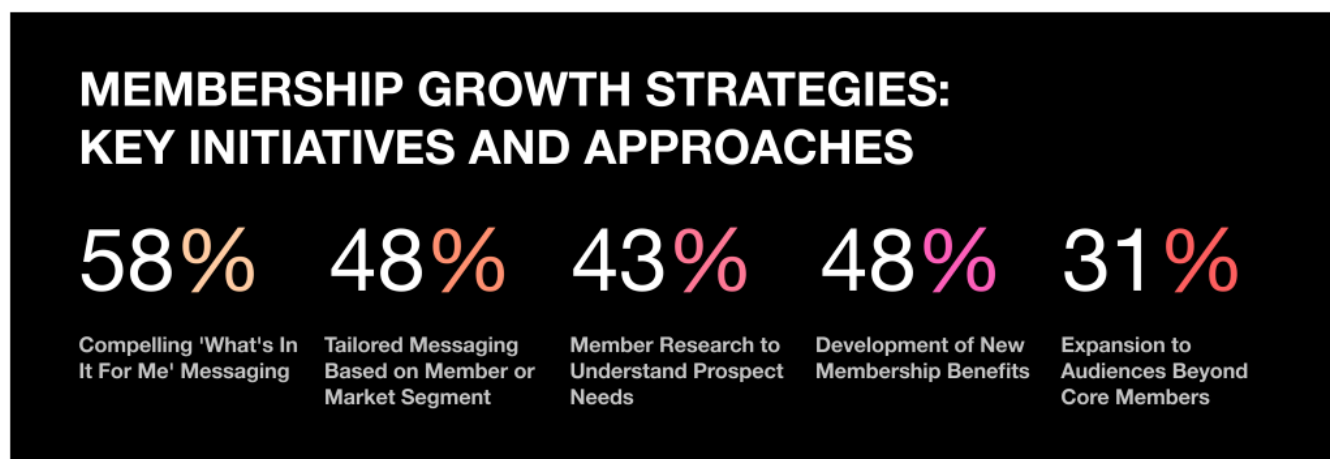
In helping members to grow professionally through the use of these type of resources, groups can provide value beyond the monetary into the growth and development of member's professional lives giving them a personal and symbiotic connection to each other.

A large graphic showing the number '64' in white and a percentage sign '%' in orange, set against a black background.

When asked what their top three reasons were for joining a professional association, 64% of Gen Z and Millennials surveyed stated networking with others.

TRANSFORM MEMBERS INTO ADVOCATES WITH PERSONALIZED ENGAGEMENT

Communication of a strong value proposition is crucial for associations to stand out, employing member-centric approaches and market segmentation. If an organization can clearly communicate the value of membership early in a member's tenure, they can create lifelong members, as member retention grows significantly after the first year of membership. Conducting research to gain insights into the needs and preferences of prospective members allows for more targeted and effective outreach. Thus enabling personalized communications and offers, which resonate with members' needs, making them feel valued and seen.



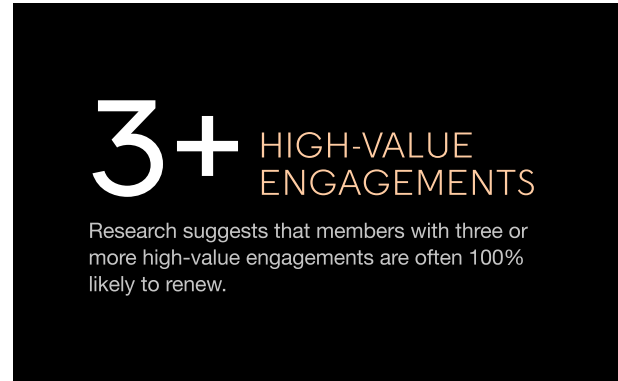
MEMBER RETENTION FOR RENEWAL SUCCESS

On average, a new member has a 50% likelihood of renewing, which increases to 80% if they renew the first time. Associations ought to prioritize engagement in the initial months of a member's tenure. Studies indicate that a focused approach to new member engagement contributes positively to long-term retention, with the initial renewal significantly influencing subsequent retention likelihood. The introduction of auto-renewal programs plays a crucial role in enhancing retention rates, especially when combining direct mail and digital outreach. 60% of organizations surveyed by Sequence Consulting said they offer auto-renew. Of those with an established auto-renew program, on average, 26% of their entire membership base is enrolled. Organizations starting an auto-renew program have grown their enrollment by 37% annually on average.



Associations are advised to initiate renewal efforts two to three months before membership expiration, allowing for a grace period to sustain benefits. Renewal initiatives should persist well beyond this grace period, and adept management of these critical phases, coupled with targeted renewal strategies, can robustly fortify membership retention, laying the foundation for sustained growth.

Research suggests that members with three or more high-value engagements are often 100 percent likely to renew, suggesting that you should not stop trying after the first engagement.



DIGITAL ADOPTION TRENDS

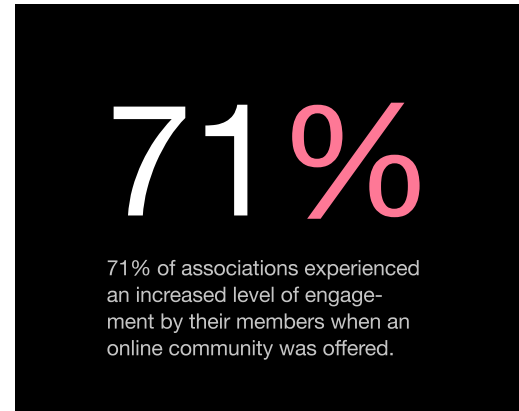
Millennials and Gen Z share similar career aspirations with previous generations, seeking opportunities for learning, networking, and career advancement. However, traditional methods used for Baby Boomers and Gen X fall short for these younger demographics. Associations primarily rely on email, social media, and events for recruitment, but to effectively engage Millennials and Gen Z, a shift towards personalized, multi-platform digital experiences is crucial. Growth in the association industry is uneven but is notable in sectors embracing technology. Organizations that are investing in digital transformation, enhancing online member engagement, and developing virtual services are expected to outpace their peers in terms of growth. This digital emphasis is enabling groups to reach a broader audience, offer more personalized member experiences, and operate more efficiently.

Younger generations are also influencing associations to integrate business-to-consumer (B2C) innovations, driving a transformation in offerings and member experiences. 68% of millennials require an integrated experience regardless of the platform. Having a mobile-friendly website that offers a seamless experience no matter what kind of device it's being viewed on is absolutely crucial.

COMMUNITY AND GAMIFICATION ADD PIECES TO THE PUZZLE

Members express a strong desire for online communities and exclusivity, with over half considering digital networking essential. Associations providing such communities experience a 71% increase in member engagement, emphasizing the importance of personalized and connected experiences.

Gamification is recognized as effective in increasing member engagement, yet 45% of associations report only moderate innovation. In a recent survey, 90% of respondents believe that gamified learning solutions are effective, and 85% of employees are shown to be more engaged when gamification solutions are applied to their professional workplace. Gamification allows members to enjoy themselves while learning the value of their membership. It also motivates members to engage more frequently and participate more actively in training sessions.



CHARTING GROWTH PROJECTIONS

Steady growth is projected in professional organizations and broader nonprofit markets. Valued at \$276.72 billion US in 2022, the market is projected to expand at a CAGR of 4.53% by 2029, as reported by Maximize Market Research. Emphasis is placed on associations expanding reach beyond core members to drive growth in a changing social and economic landscape.

By engaging with broader audiences and adapting to diverse demographic needs, associations can tap into new markets and drive membership growth.

CRAFTING EXPERIENTIAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR MEMBERS

There is a unique opportunity for professional organizations to redefine their role, by blending traditional values with innovative practices. This is a call for them to strategically recalibrate, and curate value propositions. Associations should craft experiences that blend the irreplaceable value of face-to-face interactions with the convenience and scalability of virtual platforms, thereby creating a diverse array of engagement opportunities that cater to varied preferences and circumstances. This involves investing in technology, fostering a culture of innovation, and continuously iterating offerings to ensure they are not only relevant but also pioneering in delivering value to members.

SCAN ME



To access the full list of references, please follow these steps:

1. Open your smartphone or tablet's camera app
2. Point your camera at the QR code displayed.
3. Or use this link to download our references: <https://bit.ly/3UKWxsh>

Thank you for your interest in our paper. Happy reading!