

Making Your Association More Relevant Through Marketing

It takes more to market your association today than a one-time strategy and a website or a list of benefits and services. With so much information competing for your member's attention, how do you capture and own a piece of member mind-share? Your marketing efforts will fall flat unless they are supported by a unique relevance.

What is Relevance?

Both association executives and marketers think the answer is to innovate. Improving current offerings or adding new ones does create incremental value for members, but innovation alone is not enough.

Your association must fundamentally connect and remain pertinent to your members' needs, challenges, and successes.

What's the payoff for Relevance?

Relevance creates a connection with your members. It starts with core values that come from the heart of the organization. Creating and pursuing relevance requires work at both the Board of Director level and at the staff level while conducting day-to-day business.

The payoff is something every association dreams of: members who willingly write a check for their membership, regardless of what it costs. Relevance offers members value that they consider priceless!



Below are nine ways to create relevance in your association:

1. Conviction

A single commitment, developed collectively by your Board of Directors creates an unwavering pledge to your members. It is a thought-out promise that represents your collective values and is applied to every business decision you make. Not only do members benefit from doing business with associations that exhibit conviction, so do employees. Make sure your staff "buys into" your promise and understands what the association stands for, the direction it is going in, and the important role they play in "delivering the promise."

Remember: Your staff serves as the front line to your members. Developing your internal team is a vital key to building relevance. Employees are not merely "deliverers of service and information," but are the association's brand builders.

Does your board and staff understand your brand? Can employees state it clearly so there is no question why they come to work every day? This is not a mantra, nor a mission statement, but each person's role in delivering your association's promise.

2. Commitment

In today's economy, it is even more important to understand your members' core needs. Solicit honest feedback from your members. Then, more importantly, tune in to what they need and deliver it.

Show your commitment by connecting your offerings to your members' needs. In this turbulent market, show your empathy to members by asking experienced brokers to share their stories and

advice on navigating uncertain times. Look for thought-provoking articles to pass on to brokers and members from the NAR economic forecast, REAL TRENDS, Thomas Friedman, or other respected experts.

3. **Communication**

With today's technology, it's amazing that true communication between associations and their members is still such a challenge. Find out how, when, and what your members want you to communicate with them. Members deserve a thought-out communications plan. They expect one, single electronic communication each week with interesting information that will help them become a better REALTOR® and business professional.

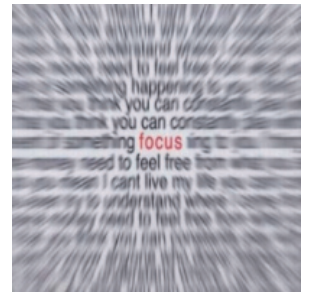


What key messages do you want to convey this year? If you focus on a critical few, you can forge stronger communications that will deepen your relationships with members.

Don't forget to think about, and then communicate the member benefits in all of your communications. Remind your members of your commitment to their success.

4. **Clarity**

Think short headlines. Deliver information in words and pictures. Invite in your young members in all your communications. If you do not clearly explain the benefit to the member in every communication, you will miss the chance to influence them and build a connection.



5. **Competence**

Your staff must play (at least) two different roles: part architect and part artist. First, the architect: Skill and technical abilities build a foundation of competence. Every staff member needs technical skills whether they sit at your MLS help desk or transfer phone calls. Innovation cannot occur without the foundation of competence.

Showing your members you can solve problems quickly, and communicate the progress along the way, turns competency into trust.

Skill + responsiblites = competence and trust

6. **Caring**

The second role you play is artist. The art of customer service turns your brand (your promise) into behavior that the member can see. Display a positive demeanor. Look a member in the eye when you talk to them and be a good listener. Show equal attention for new and older members alike. Showing you care is valuable, even when you have to deliver difficult news. Every staff member is part of your marketing department.

7. **Call them!**

"Young people are simply not interested in getting involved." How many times have you heard this in your board meeting or in conversation? Think back on why you became involved in your association. There is no higher compliment than to be asked. Call a high-potential young professional, or better yet, pull them aside and mentor them about how association leadership will help them advance in their career.

Association President: Set the example and mentor a young professional. Share what you know.
Association CEO: Start a blog and converse freely with members, or write a column. You can take great insights from conversation among members. Keep your dialogue open and honest.

8. Community – Inside and outside the Association

Associations can and should look for ways to give back because marketing means presenting into the fabric of the larger community. A pursuit for the common good. There is a specific “happiness derived from doing good for others and making the world a better place” (www.spitzercenter.org).

When your members give of themselves, their time, attention, and their knowledge for the good of others, they share in the pursuit for the common good. This is referred to as doing something for the good of the “greater glue!”

9. Change in demographics

For most associations, 30% or more of your membership are under the age of 40. Getting their attention is challenging, even when you understand what they need. After you choose your target market(s), develop marketing activities to support their needs.

1. Identify your Board’s values and then your Association’s promise
2. Engage your board and staff to deliver your promise
3. Adapt to your members’ needs and build relationships with good communications and empathy
4. Be honest at all costs
5. Communicate clearly how the member benefits from anything you do
6. Be transparent. Your members goals, successes and challenges are yours
7. Be come an active member in a larger community
8. Reach out to your target audience in your programs and services

market(s), develop marketing activities to support their needs.

If your target is young professionals, focus on networking and education. Make sure you include current and relevant topics specifically developed for them. Offer tips from other young, successful agents. Create an environment not only for them to learn, but also to associate with other young members to build their own referral network. Offer them several ways to get information: e-mail, your website, and your associations Facebook page. Make sure you are headed in the direction, so your association doesn’t get left behind. These members are your future.

As you relate better to your members, your association will show significance. Work your way through the list above and watch your members pay a little more attention to you and your association every day. This is **Relevance**.

Melynn Sight is President of nSight Marketing. She is a marketing consultant committed to the success of trade associations. Contact Melynn at melynn@nsightmarketing.com or 913.261.9100.

