

# ADVANTAGE SOLUTIONS



For Association Professionals And Volunteers



## MEMBERSHIP GROWTH: CONVENTIONAL AND NON-CONVENTIONAL STRATEGIES

By Jeanne Sheehy

One association goal that usually remains constant is membership growth and retention. Even strong organizations constantly look for ways to increase their member base, extend the reach of their services, and retain valued members. There are many elements that come into play affecting an association's ability not only to grow but to retain the members they have. Below are some traditional and not-so-traditional approaches to this issue.

### Research

Ideally, if time and money were not an issue, then original research would be a regular component of any member growth and retention initiative. Focus groups and surveys can reveal what's on members' minds, what kind of target prospects are out there and what they are looking for in an association, and what's happening in the industry or profession that could play a part.

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## CREDIT CARD SECURITY FROM AN IT PERSPECTIVE

By Chris Hecht

Your association's Web site likely offers members the option of purchasing products and registering for events online with their credit cards. Members enjoy the convenience of making transactions anywhere and anytime, and your association enjoys expanded revenue opportunities. But along with this convenience comes the threat of credit card fraud, which the Federal Trade

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## A MEASURE OF SUCCESS *By Ken Monroe*



Associations should regularly assess how successful they are in realizing their mission and serving their members. To determine their level of success, associations typically employ traditional measures in the following categories:

- **Membership**—Has it increased, decreased, or remained the same?
- **Financial position**—Does the organization have a healthy bottom line?
- **Conferences and educational offerings**—What is the attendance? Do attendees give them good evaluations?
- **Communication vehicles**—Does the association receive good audience feedback?
- **Advocacy issues**—How many “wins” has the association achieved?

Data for these measures are relatively easy to collect and aggregate, and the measures, in turn, are easy to quantify. But do they tell the whole story? While the more traditional scorecard offers a snapshot of an association’s current success, other indicators are required to capture an association’s ability to *sustain success* and *position itself for success in the future*—two key responsibilities of leaders. Quantitative measures such as those above, although necessary, provide only a static picture of an association’s success, and association leaders need to look beyond them to the organizational dynamics that underlie a strong outlook.

Let’s examine some measures of success that generally do not find their way into routine association benchmarking.

- **Understanding the changing industry or profession.** Unless you understand the market forces in the area you represent, you will not be able to assess your members’ changing needs and be ready to meet them.
- **Understanding members’ decision model.** What factors influence your members’ decision to join or rejoin your association? You should know members’ “purchase determinants” and how they are changing.
- **Well positioned decision processes.** Does your governance system support the kind and pace of decision making that the emerging environment requires?
- **Staff composition.** Success depends on cultivating a staff with the skills mix necessary to meet your members’ future needs and demands.

- **Knowing your organization’s corporate culture.** Can you describe it in a few sentences? Is the staff culture and the leadership culture compatible? Will those cultures support the decision-making needs of the future as identified above?
- **Organizational relationships.** Has your association established alliances with other organizations or institutions, including government entities, that support the future direction of your organization? You should have an explicit strategy for what relationships are necessary for the future, what you expect from those relationships, and what you contribute to those relationships.

These are the qualitative or “soft” criteria for success, but they are just as critical to future success as numeric results. Granted, they pose technical challenges in terms of measurement instruments; however, the committed association will seek and find the appropriate resources.

Data for traditional measures are relatively easy to collect and aggregate, and the measures, in turn, are easy to quantify. But do they tell the whole story?

The trend toward qualitative measures has emerged with the association industry as a whole examining in-depth the cultural and behavioral attributes of successful organizations. Specifically, ASAE & The Center for Association Leadership has recently published *7 Measures of Success: What Remarkable Associations Do That Others Don’t*, which presents empirical evidence supporting strategic behaviors of visionary associations. Among ASAE’s seven measures are organizational adaptability, alliance building, and a customer service culture. With ASAE’s work as a catalyst, association executives can expect to be engaged in an ongoing dialogue regarding the long view of prosperity.

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## CASE STUDY: TRI ACHIEVES SOLID Foothold IN THE FUTURE

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### Challenge

Since its founding in 1971, the Roof Tile Institute (RTI)—a Chicago-based, non-profit trade association with a membership primarily of tile manufacturers—had established itself as a leading technical resource in the tile industry. In 2003, however, RTI recognized it was time to grow beyond its technical base and examine its structure, assets, and marketing strategies in order to increase its presence and recognition in the concrete and clay tile industry. That’s when the organization turned to Bostrom.

### Solution

Bostrom led RTI through a strategic planning and branding process coupled with market research. This process, in turn, built a path of goals and objectives for the Institute’s future. One important goal was to expand the Institute’s reach in the industry through a new brand identity and membership structure. RTI received a new name as the Tile Roofing Institute (TRI) and opened up its membership for the first time in its history to contractors, suppliers, distributors, builders, architects, designers, and trade associations.

Subsequently, Bostrom worked with TRI to develop marketing initiatives to support these new membership levels. In addition, Bostrom teamed with TRI committees to create and execute a comprehensive marketing plan including an integrated communication system, membership development campaigns, conference growth, and programming targeted to members.

### Results

TRI posted impressive gains just 18 months after plan implementation. Some of the highlights include:

- 500% growth in membership
- 50% increase in bi-annual meeting attendance
- 25% growth in non-dues revenue

Bostrom shares in TRI’s success. According to Mike Penny, TRI chariman, “Based on Bostrom’s experience with trade associations we are extremely pleased with the expertise and direction they’ve built for TRI’s future.”



# CREDIT CARD SECURITY FROM AN IT PERSPECTIVE continued from page 1

Commission has found is the most common form of identity theft. Maintaining secure information systems provides your organization with the main line of defense in protecting members’ personal information against theft and fraudulent use.

The PCI Security Standards Council—a consortium of stakeholders in the personal credit card industry (PCI)—has developed an industry-wide technical security standard for organizations to adopt in protecting account holder information. The most recent version, 1.1, was released in September and appears below.

Association leaders should check with their IT departments that they are in compliance with these standards. Some of the standards may require allocation of additional association resources—for example, purchasing anti-virus updates—in order to protect private member information. Other standards may require executive directions to the IT department, such as requiring a written information security policy.

## PCI Data Security Standard

| Principle  | Requirement  |
|--|--|
| <b>Build and Maintain a Secure Network</b>         | <i>Requirement 1:</i> Install and maintain a firewall configuration to protect cardholder data<br><i>Requirement 2:</i> Do not use vendor-supplied defaults for system passwords and other security parameters                         |
| <b>Protect Cardholder Data</b>                     | <i>Requirement 3:</i> Protect stored cardholder data<br><i>Requirement 4:</i> Encrypt transmission of cardholder data across open, public networks   |
| <b>Maintain a Vulnerability Management Program</b> | <i>Requirement 5:</i> Use and regularly update anti-virus software<br><i>Requirement 6:</i> Develop and maintain secure systems and applications   |
| <b>Implement Strong Access Control Measures</b>    | <i>Requirement 7:</i> Restrict access to cardholder data by business need-to-know<br><i>Requirement 8:</i> Assign a unique ID to each person with computer access<br><i>Requirement 9:</i> Restrict physical access to cardholder data |
| <b>Regularly Monitor and Test Networks</b>         | <i>Requirement 10:</i> Track and monitor all access to network resources and cardholder data<br><i>Requirement 11:</i> Regularly test security systems and processes   |
| <b>Maintain an Information Security Policy</b>     | <i>Requirement 12:</i> Maintain a policy that addresses information security   |

Source: PCI Security Standards Council, 2006.

There are tools that help organizations support data security standards, including secure sockets layer (SSL) or digital certificates and secure Internet gateway services between businesses and credit card networks. Digital certificates—for example, Thawte—validate your association’s Internet identity, thereby building trust in your Web site. In addition, digital

certificates protect data transmission through encryption. Internet gateways, such as Authorize.net, route credit card payment information through secure networks.

For more information on the topics in this article, visit the following Web sites.

- PCI Security Standards Council: <https://www.pcisecuritystandards.org>.
- Details on SSL: <https://www.thawte.com/ssl-digital-certificates/ssl-info/index.html>.

- How Authorize.net works: <http://www.authorize.net/company/whatwedo/>.

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But realistically, not many organizations have the time, money, and resources to put together a full scale research project. So, if you're in a small association or simply have a small budget, then go gorilla and become a detective for a few days. First, find out what research already exists. You'd be amazed at the amount of information you can gather from existing surveys from conferences or meetings, or research from third-party firms.

**Don't forget to take a step back and look at your programs. How well are they doing? Do they need a face lift or do they need to retire?**

Another tactic is to make a few calls to members, ex-members, prospective members, and find out what's going on with them, the industry, and their thoughts on the association. You may even want to think outside the box a bit and call a

competitive association or a prospect in a field or category that the association has never reached before. It doesn't take much time and effort to make a few calls and dig. This will give you the base information necessary to create your growth and retention programs.

### Corporate Support

Reaching out to corporations for funding is often a primary source of revenue for an association, but those

strategic relationships can be leveraged for membership growth as well. Look at your current sponsorship menu and include a group of corporate memberships as part of it. For example, a certain level of corporate sponsorship could provide discounts to conferences and free membership for the corporation's employees, thereby bringing new blood to events and the association as a whole. Plus, you can gain heightened visibility to a variety of networks within these large organizations.

Working with companies on their internal networks offers another opportunity for membership growth. If they have groups or communities that meet about subject matter relevant to your association, then use your contact to get in front of them with your services—maybe it's a free program for them to attend with a membership discount as an incentive to join.

### Word of Mouth Promotion

There has been a lot of "buzz" about word of mouth marketing (WOMM), and the strategy does have some teeth to it. It's a creative and economical way to get the message out about the benefits and existence of your association. WOMM is defined as activities that companies undertake to generate personal recommendations as well as referrals for brand names, products, and services.

A WOMM promotion may consist of targeting your power members to spread the word about the association. You can provide them with tools to catch the attention of those around them spurring discussion about a meeting, a member benefit, or the association in general. Marketers also use publicity techniques as well as viral marketing methods to achieve behavioral responses to spreading the word.

There are many resources available for this tactic, such as the Word of Mouth Marketing Association ([www.womma.org](http://www.womma.org)) and Buzz marketing ([www.buzzmarketing.com](http://www.buzzmarketing.com)).

### Targeted Programming

Don't forget to take a step back and look at your programs. How well are they doing? Do they need a face lift or do they need to retire? Are there programs that can be put online to increase your reach, decrease expenses, and better target your audience? Are your membership recruitment efforts reflected in your programming?

Every program brings a subtle opportunity to promote the benefits of your association, reinforce your value to

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members, and entice prospective members to join. Make sure that your marketing communications, program development, and membership teams work together to fully leverage the content and marketing strategy.

### Back to Basics

Sometimes associations get swept up in new ideas and forget that the old ones are still valid. Marketing strategy is built on long-tested approaches to human behavior. Your membership growth and retention may need only an integrated plan with measurable results to track your progress. Revisit your materials, communications plan, advertising, promotion, messaging, etc., and build a new annual marketing plan with membership growth and retention as one of your major goals.

When the environment gets out of control, you need to take a deep breath, weather it, and start again. However the outside elements affect your membership, you can be prepared by listening to your staff and members, making sure you're getting the right data consistently to track your efforts, and mixing the old with the new to build a successful future.

## A MEASURE OF SUCCESS

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In today's rapidly changing environment, associations will find that addressing success criteria for the future may prove even more important than this year's performance. And the key factors that differentiate truly successful organizations from those that "just get by" may well be grounded in these criteria.

### ABOUT BOSTROM

Bostrom Corporation is a professional services firm offering comprehensive management, consulting and outsourcing to associations and other not-for-profits. Since its founding in 1933, Bostrom continues to meet the needs that define our clients' success. For more information please visit our Web site at [www.bostrom.com](http://www.bostrom.com) or call 312.644.0828.

