

Eventbrite



MemberWise

How Associations Can Achieve Membership Growth and Improve Member Engagement via Events



Introduction

Members are the lifeblood of any membership body, association, society or club – so how do you keep your current members engaged? How can you reach out to potential new recruits and how can you demonstrate enhanced/tangible member value?



Organising live events can help you achieve both.

Inviting experts to speak, offering specialist training, or simply providing a chance for your members to meet and network can provide real added value – and highlight your organisation's work to outsiders.

Not only that, but events can also represent a potentially valuable revenue stream for membership organisations, allowing them to invest in other projects and increase their impact in other areas.

To find out how associations and membership bodies are approaching events - and to identify potential opportunities being missed – we partnered with **MemberWise** (a network of over 4,000+ association and membership professionals) to survey 120 association and membership organisation representatives.

We asked about the frequency and type of events they held in the last 12 months, as well as the motivation behind them.

We also looked at the success of their events, from how many people attended and how much money they made, to whether they increased engagement and membership numbers. We also found out how much time and money they had to invest to pull them off.

Do you want to expand and invigorate your membership? Read on to find out what events could do for your organisation!



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Associations recognise the value of events

The good news is associations and membership bodies largely understand the importance of events and the majority are already hosting them frequently.

Our survey found that 95% of those organisations questioned had held an event in the last 12 months. What's more, they're running events pretty regularly.

An impressive 20% reported to be running in excess of 52 events per year – more than one a week – and a further 6% hold activity most weeks.

Another 20% hold more than one event per month, while 34% hold an event at least every two months.

Only 20% of those associations holding events held fewer than four in the last year.



Consider:

Are you truly optimising the frequency of your events?



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Knowledge sharing is driving the agenda

The associations and membership bodies we questioned held different types of events dependant on whether they were targeting a local or national audience.

Most popular for serving a wider membership were conferences, with 76% of the organisations having held a national conference in the last 12 months.

Award ceremonies were the second most popular format for nationwide events, with 73% having run an awards celebration to recognise the achievements of their members.

Webinars were utilised by 70% to spread knowledge across their membership (the third most popular format for national events), but this format was the least popular for locally-focused events (33%), not surprising given that people who live locally would prefer to meet in person than digitally.

The preference for local events was to get everyone together face-to-face for either training and workshops, or networking (70% and 69% respectively).

Conversely, dedicated networking events were the least chosen event format for bringing members together nationally (55%).

Presumably, associations feel the opportunity to meet with other members alone is either better served locally (or via special interest events), or is simply not sufficient to draw members from across the country, and so there is more focus on general education, training and recognition.

Equally, the data indicates that associations don't necessarily see the value in organising a whole conference programme for a local audience, with only 34% having done so in the last year.

However, there are some event formats that are equally popular, whether for a local or national membership. Nearly 70% of those surveyed had organised training or workshops targeted at both audiences, while 58% had run Special Interest Group (SIG) events with both local and national participation. Association dinners were also utilised fairly equally for both audiences.



IDEA

Ensure your future events meet the needs and requirements of your members. You can ensure this by surveying delegates via your post event feedback online/offline questionnaire/survey.



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Depth over breadth

Whether associations and membership bodies are targeting a local or a national audience, event attendance tends not to exceed 200 people (91% reported to having no more than 200 people on average at each event).

This may reflect a larger number of smaller membership bodies responding to the survey; but it is also an indication that associations are focused on running targeted, high value events for their members over events aimed at broader awareness.

Our survey did identify a handful of large-scale gatherings (two with more than 2,000 attendees) but the size of event most frequently held by membership organisations was between 61-100 people (28%).

Just under 20% of the organisations frequently attracted between 101 and 200 guests to their events, while a further 22% focused on more personal gatherings for between 21 to 40 people.

Interestingly, nearly 50% of respondents said the events held by their associations and membership organisations were for members only, which represents a big opportunity for growth.



IDEA

By opening events up to both members and non-members (as the other 50% of organisations state they already do) you could increase attendance, attract new members and make extra money.

Of course, this needs to be set against the need to define certain events as an exclusive membership benefit. That being said, there is potential for mixed events where members enjoy free, or heavily discounted, passes; while non-members still get access for a fee.



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Inclusive events generate more income

According to the results of our survey, opening your event up to both members and non-members enables associations to charge more for tickets, particularly to non-members.

Associations and membership bodies which mostly held events exclusively for their members were most likely to charge nothing for attendance (37%).

On the other hand, associations that were welcoming outsiders were most likely to be charging for tickets – and charging a pretty penny; with the £251-£500 price bracket being the most popular.

In general, inclusive events commanded higher ticket prices, with 53% charging in excess of £50 per ticket, versus 34% of members-only events. Only 11% of events staged for an audience of both members and non-members were free of charge.

This finding ties back to the previous recommendation of offering tiered ticket options to members and non-members, allowing you to provide high value events as an inclusive membership benefit, while also delivering a revenue stream (and potential new members) through offering access, at a premium, to non-members.

The range of ticket prices being charged showed no real correspondence to the size of event being held – higher ticket prices were charged for both large and small events. Likewise, cheap and free-to-attend events also varied in attendance.



IDEA

Consider organising taster events or enable new members to attend one event either free-of-charge or at a discounted rate. This will encourage future participation.



Consider taking events online to grow revenue

Looking at which type of events commanded the highest ticket prices uncovered some surprising results. Webinars and virtual events, which should cost the least to stage due to zero venue or catering costs, appear to be the most lucrative.

Online events are the most likely of all event formats to be charging in excess of £100 per ticket (38%). In fact, three of the associations and member organisations we surveyed said they charge upwards of £500 for their webinars and virtual events.

So, for any associations not currently exploiting online events this appears to represent a big potential opportunity. Not only are the staging costs lower, but it's easier to open up events of this nature to a national or even international audience.

Conferences were the second most 'valuable' format with 37% charging more than £100 per ticket. This was followed by Special Interest Group (SIG) events, 34% of which command a ticket price in excess of £100. However, this was also the format most likely to offer free attendance (26%). This was followed by awards events, 24% of which invited people along free of charge.



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Associations believe bigger is better

When judging the success of events, the most important factor is the number of delegates that they attract, with 75% of associations using this metric.

Also important is increasing member engagement (65% agree) – and for those organising free to attend events this is the main goal.

What's striking here is the lack of priority given to increasing new member acquisition. It is the least popular metric about which we asked, indicated as a measure of success by only 35% of the associations.

Furthermore, only 38% are actively seeking to improve their existing member retention. Given that member organisations cannot exist without members, associations shouldn't overlook these key KPIs particularly when it can cost up to eight times less to retain an existing member than to recruit a new member!

Events can be a highly effective recruitment tool, helping associations to grow headcount and become financially stronger. Associations and membership bodies that think holistically when it comes to their event design – pleasing existing members while engaging with new ones - will be the ones that do best.



IDEA

Analyse the personas of your delegates and consider if your events can be optimised to meet their needs/requirements.

Not as expensive or time consuming as you might think

Running a great event takes thought, effort and investment – and 94% of associations are organising their events in-house rather than outsourcing - but according to our survey results, they're not as labour (or cash) intensive as you'd imagine.

The most time consuming element is putting together the content. For 29% of organisers (the largest single proportion) this took between 21-40 hours per event. A further 27% spent even fewer hours (11-20) putting together the programme.

Organisational aspects such as finding and booking the venue and arranging the catering were the second most time consuming. Even so, the most frequently given duration for this task was between just 1 to 10 hours (32%) per event.

Attendee management tasks, such as ticketing and registration were most likely to take fewer than 10 hours (32%), while 27% said it took them a bit longer at 11-20 hours per event.

Event promotion was the job the associations dedicated least time to, with nearly 60% spending fewer than 20 hours raising awareness on social media and via email, for example.

When it comes to financial investment, the largest single proportion of associations (32%) were able to organise their events on an average budget of between £1-£1000. A further 14% spent up to £2,500 and 13% up to £5,000, while 4% spent nothing at all.

A total of 30% had a medium to large budget (between £5001-£50,000), but only a small proportion (9%) spent big bucks, with a budget in excess of £50,000 per event.



Recommendation

Ensure you include a question in your event registration form that captures where delegates heard about your event and use this insight to focus future budget/effort.



Email, social media and digital key to communication

Associations and membership bodies are using a range of marketing channels to promote their events, but the popularity of these differs dependent on the audience they are seeking to attract.

For encouraging existing members to come along, email and their own website are the key channels for getting in touch, with 99% and 95% of respondents using these respectively.

Social media is the third most important communications channel with members according to 92% of associations. After that there is a large drop off, but blogging (46%) and taking out adverts in trade journals (42%) are the next most popular.

Deemed least useful for reaching out to members is paid marketing – used by only 13%.

When looking at how membership organisations reach non-members, we see that social media is most important (used by 77% of respondents).

This is followed by their own website (73%), and email (65%).

The least used way to reach non-members was phone, where just 8% of organisers used this method.

An opportunity to streamline attendee management

Using third party, professional event management software can hugely reduce the amount of time and energy organisers must invest into key tasks, like ticketing and registration.

Despite this, our survey found that 25% are still using basic tools such as Excel spreadsheets, Word documents and email to manage delegates.

A further 27% are using self-built ticketing and registration systems, and could be missing out on great features, such as comprehensive reporting and analytics, custom questions, promotional tools, and integration with other best-in-class technology.

Associations to increase future event activity

As the data shows, the value of events to associations and membership bodies is being recognised and 58% plan to increase their activity in the future.

Encouragingly, 75% of those associations and membership bodies not currently holding events also intend to do so in the next 12 months.

There are many reasons why associations and membership bodies want to organise events for their members, but bringing people together is something they all agree is important. Nearly 100% of those we asked said they agreed or strongly agreed.

In addition, 96% agreed that events provided a great opportunity for members to learn and benchmark against their peers.

Meanwhile, nearly 70% of the associations agreed that events are a cost effective way to meet their objectives.



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Conclusion

It's clear that hosting events is a primary way for associations and membership bodies to provide members with value, whether they be opportunities to learn new skills, understand industry regulations or best practices, share experience with colleagues, or simply celebrate success.

Bringing people together through events is a chance to both engage and educate your existing membership base; and spread your messages beyond to a wider audience, letting your association grow and flourish.

It is clear from this research that members continue to value events as a tangible member benefit (in an ever digital world) and that they can be used as an effective element of your association and membership body's member value proposition (MVP).

Our research also indicates that events are not widely used as a marketing tool by the majority of associations and membership bodies, and this is perhaps a great opportunity missed.

Eventbrite

Eventbrite enables people all over the world to plan, promote, and sell out any event. Since its inception in 2006, Eventbrite has processed over 200 million tickets in 187 countries.

The online ticketing platform makes it easy for anyone to discover events, and to share the events they are attending with the people they know. Eventbrite provides a professional, simple way to manage and promote events to help you reach your business goals.

Learn more at www.eventbrite.co.uk/how-it-works/ or call 0800 652 4993.



MemberWise

About MemberWise

MemberWise is the leading free professional network within the association and membership sector. The network represents over 4,000 association and membership professionals and provides practical help, support and best practice sharing opportunities.

Benefits include a dedicated website, online professional networking opportunities, a monthly newsletter, Insight videos and a growing programme of conferences and events.

Visit www.memberwise.org.uk for further information.