

3 Marketing Trends To Help Improve Your Chapter Membership



According to Marketing General Incorporated's (MGI) 2024 Membership Marketing Benchmarking Report, membership in associations continues "...to rebound from the challenges of the past few years," and chapters "...are steadily expanding their membership." Nearly half of respondents (47%) say their membership grew, and just under half (49%) reported growth in total chapter membership over the past five years, versus 46% in 2023 and 41% in 2022. Of the nearly 700 individual, trade and combination associations surveyed, less than a quarter (21%) reported a membership decline, which MGI says is the lowest decline in the 16 years of their survey.



What's driving these increases in membership?

The MGI survey results showed that membership increases could be attributed a few things these chapters have been doing, including:

- Providing value
- Engaging in continuous innovation
- Reaching emerging generations
- Increasing member engagement.

How do membership numbers look for your chapter?

Some of the chapters we've spoken with have shared that things aren't as positive for their chapters as the numbers in the MGI survey show. COVID-19 made it difficult for many chapters to keep the members they had, let alone bring in new ones. Members and those individuals the chapters would

have approached to join often had to choose where they would spend their money and their time. Many had lost their jobs or were working less than full-time, figuring out how to pay their bills, deal with their children's virtual educations, etc.

During that time, you were probably looking for ways to help existing members and weren't too focused on increasing chapter membership. Your members needed your chapter services more than ever, including your job board, forum, educational opportunities and virtual networking events.

3 Marketing Trends to Help Your Chapter Increase Membership

The changes many of these chapters surveyed by MGI made to overcome these challenges and connect with and bring in new members are pretty straightforward; they include making better use of email, events and outreach. No need for complete chapter rebrands, months-long marketing programs or overhauled formal outreach programs here. Instead, they increased membership by adjusting how they manage activities they already do, like networking, education and specialized information programs, which are often at the top of the list of reasons their existing members gave for joining a chapter.

With some small shifts to how they engage with current and prospective members, these chapters are seeing positive, incremental improvements in engagement that lead to an increase in membership.

Recruiting through email. Contrary to what many chapters think, email is not dead. When used correctly, email can be a highly effective tool for recruiting new members. Of the associations surveyed, 85% use email most often to recruit new members. Do you track member guests, identifying and adding them to your email list when they register and/or attend an event? Segmenting your email list can be highly effective for connecting with potential members, while helping you better engage current members, when you deliver messaging that's specific to the needs of the different audiences. Send member guests your chapter newsletter, so they can see all you have going on, as well as emails that discuss membership in the chapter, including all the benefits of membership and how easy it is to become one.

Increasing visibility at events. Once a member guest arrives at one of your chapter events, what happens? Do they check in and blend in with a sea of other nameless attendees? Or are they easy to spot and engage? If you're not already using name badges, they are an easy addition to your new member toolkit. In addition to using them to identify board members, committee members and



chapter volunteers, consider special name badges for guests. A colored badge or a special sticker on a name badge lets board members and your general membership easily identify potential members, introduce themselves and start to create a connection that will last beyond the event.

Making follow up calls. One of the most important considerations for new membership is connecting with member guests after they've attended a chapter event. Not following up could make the person feel like you didn't notice them and leave them with unanswered questions. Follow up by phone provides an additional connection that the attendee will appreciate and may not get from a follow up email. Who you choose to do the follow up is up to you; board members are always a good choice, but everyone in your chapter can be a spokesperson when they have the right tools and guidance. Provide talking points around membership – cost, benefits, different membership levels, etc. – and include ideas for what makes an effective phone conversation with potential members. That could include things like making introductions, establishing rapport, asking the right questions and listening to the response, delivering the right message, overcoming objections, etc.

Other chapter new member strategies

In addition to these strategies, the MGI report touched on other easy-to-implement actions these chapters do to better engage potential members. They included adding a Join Now membership button on their chapter website; ensuring the chapter has and uses compelling “what’s in it for new members” messaging; and providing multiple membership tiers, like options for college students, recent graduates and retirees.

Bringing new members to your chapter doesn't mean you need to completely rebrand or change your already extensive programming. A few small tweaks can have the big impact on membership you're looking for.

