

3 Questions to Ask Before Going with a National Solution

Generally, what we have seen when a national association offers a chapter solution they are not providing a fully developed web application needed to operate a chapter, instead the solution tends to be rather simplistic. This is typically a web page on the national website with limited information and functionality, which in turn means limited value to your members and more work for you as a volunteer board member.

Your members and prospective members will spend less time with your chapter online, becoming frustrated with the user experience as it fails to deliver on presentation, ease of use and the necessary tools to engage with your chapter. They expect more. If you have a limited, basic web presence you won't be making the type of impression they expect as local leaders in your industry looking to gain knowledge and to make connections.

If your chapter is considering only utilizing a national association provided solution, there are 3 questions to consider before making the move:

1 Does our board need more efficiency to be effective volunteer leaders?

Having a demanding career and a volunteer leadership position can feel as though you have two jobs. If you have to use various systems to operate your chapter, you will need to devote a lot of time and energy to manage it all. You will need to use a tool for event registration, email marketing, membership management, surveying, the list could go on. If you have an all-in-one system that is well supported by the software vendor, you will only need to use that system which has all the features at your fingertips and will save you time by avoiding the redundant data entry and the hassle of syncing data between the various systems.

"Your members and prospective members expect more."

Does our board need more:

1. Efficiency to be an effective volunteer leader

2. Functionality than a national solution offers

3. Than a national solution can provide

2 Does our board need more functionality than a national solution offers?

To have a successful chapter, more than just a content only website is needed. You need an all-in-one association management system (AMS) made with a chapter like yours in mind. You'll want to manage your members' information, keep track of prospective members, allow them to easily register for events, and communicate with them regarding events/meetings or any other initiatives related to the chapter's mission. In short, a national solution, sometimes referred to as a microsite, simply falls short and your members and prospective members will notice.

A microsite can be very limiting because it has minimal features and basic information. It's very noticeably ineffective, and without the needed functionality it generally takes a lot of time and effort. By combining your event registration, email marketing, membership management, and website content management into one system you will have the tools needed to efficiently operate your chapter and save you valuable time allowing you to focus on why you volunteered to become a board member in the first place.

3 Does our board need more than a national solution can provide?

A national solution will typically only provide the basic information regarding your chapter. This includes: board member contact information, a brief overview, and maybe a blurb about the next event. Your chapter needs more than that; more tools to manage the chapter, more control over the image of the chapter, and more opportunity. You want to be able to provide more to attract prospective members and retain your current members. We recommend illustrating your unique chapter value by showcasing your previous and upcoming events, providing industry relevant content to supplement your educational programming, and delivering a professional image all in an effort to drive online activity. This online activity can then provide the chapter the opportunity to generate significant non-dues revenue whether that is through a robust sponsorship program or even an online store, which would most likely not even be an option with a national solution.

National Solution	StarChapter
A small auxiliary webpage or microsite	StarChapter is a member-friendly association software company serving local chapters of professional and trade associations in the United States and Canada. The software combines event registration, membership management, email marketing, mobile friendly website layouts, eCommerce, and web services.
Need additional third-party event registration tool	Included
Need additional third-party email marketing tool	Included
Need additional membership management tool	Included
Need additional survey tool	Included
Events need to be created/updated manually on national solution	Included
Data needs to be synced between multiple systems to have current and relevant records	Included

Your national association may package their solution as a replacement to your current chapter management practices, but it simply falls short of that promise. As a chapter leader you need more. Also, consider if national presents this solution as a free option, review your chapter charter or membership fees. If they are rising it could be due to this limited offering.

One way that we have seen as a successful use of a national association provided solution has been as a method to drive traffic to your own chapter’s website and AMS system. You get the advantage of having a presence on the national site and capturing that traffic, but you also get the necessary ability to manage your chapter and control the content provided to your members. StarChapter can provide that complete chapter software solution for you and it will be powered by the functionality and support that your board needs to be efficient and effective at an affordable price.