

The Hidden Costs Of Ignoring Your Association Chapter's Online Presence



You have an association chapter website, you send a chapter newsletter and you post on social media. All of this is enough for a strong association chapter online presence, right?



Maybe. You may have an effective online presence if:

- Your up-to-date association chapter website lets different audiences easily find what they're looking for.
- Your newsletter is in the right format that comes out on a regular schedule.
- You're posting appropriately and regularly on social media.

Maintaining a strong online presence is a challenge for many association chapters. With all you're trying to accomplish to keep the chapter running effectively, your online presence may become less of a priority. But that presence is often the first interaction many people may have with your chapter, and an outdated website, inaccessible newsletter or inactive social media can have consequences that go far beyond just being unpleasant or difficult to use.

The Downstream Effects of a Poor Online Presence

When you don't provide what members, member guests, sponsors and other audiences want and

need online, you may cause those audiences to think your chapter can't give them what they are looking for. When that happens, they often go elsewhere to find it.

Your audiences' perceptions of your chapter are often based on what they see online. They may see a stale website and think your chapter is dormant or that it's disbanded. Even if their thoughts aren't that extreme and they only think your chapter doesn't offer much, your board isn't engaged, etc., the outcomes are the same:

- Less traffic to your online channels
- Limited reach of those channels
- Decreased engagement and membership.

Do you have...

An out-of-date website? Your association chapter board members may not visit your website regularly. They're working with chapter business every day and don't need to go online to access resources. They're not seeing what your members, guests, sponsors, etc., see, and they don't realize those who are thinking about joining your chapter or even just attending a monthly meeting can't find all they need on your website. Perhaps they can find event information but then they have to RSVP by sending an email and then use PayPal to pay. The board may also not realize that those individual steps mean some potential attendees won't attend, because they won't take the time to do both.

Being out of date can apply to more than your web content, processes, and design. A perceived lack of website security can also have a negative impact on your chapter. If your website doesn't have a valid, current SSL (secure sockets layer) certificate, even if people can register and pay for an event through your website, many won't because they don't believe the site is safe.

A PDF newsletter? Many association chapters send their newsletters as PDFs and email attachments. It's easy to write a newsletter in Microsoft Word, turn it into a PDF and attach it to an email. But when the recipient doesn't have a PDF reader on their desktop or phone, they can't read all the great information you're sending. Even if they can open the PDF, an association chapter newsletter in a PDF format can't be optimized for search engines (e.g., SEO). This means your great content won't be as easily found in a Google search. This limits the number of people outside the chapter who will have the chance to read it.



Try sending an email with a short summary and a link to the newsletter and individual articles. With the association chapter newsletter housed on the chapter website, it's optimized for SEO and much easier to find, no matter who looks for it.

Stale social media? More people probably visit an association chapter website than their social feeds. However, that doesn't mean they ignore association chapter Facebook and LinkedIn feeds, blogs, public and private chapter forums, etc. If your chapter has any of those channels, they need to be current and relevant. There's nothing worse than finding a blog post that's six months old, or even a more recent one, without any feedback or comments.

Have a volunteer responsible for keeping your association chapter social feeds current. This can include hiding older posts or adding comments and asking questions that keep the conversations going.

Consider an Online Audit

An association chapter online audit drives you to closely explore your online content. It's the first step to ensuring your online presence continues to meet the needs of your different audiences. And it's also the first step to getting your presence back on track. Each day you wait to update your website or post on your social media could cost you in more ways than you think.

