Update Your Holiday Card To Double As Your "Year In Review"

The end of the year is the perfect time to thank everyone — members, sponsors, volunteers, etc. — who helped make your association chapter what it is. It's also a good time to remind everyone of all you've accomplished and enjoyed together this year because of your volunteers' hard work.



Do you normally send an end-of-year/happy new year email? Emails are good, but only if people open and read them. With an average email open rate for nonprofit organizations just under 29%, sometimes even with the best of intentions, many of your chapter emails may just get deleted.

Virtual holiday cards with "Year in Review" updates can be an effective alternative to your standard end of year chapter email, with a look at what you did and a nod to what's planned for the coming year.

The benefits of a year-in-review holiday card

Chapter year-in-review cards can increase engagement with all your audiences, especially when you pair your narrative with photos, videos, and numbers that share results. And maybe even with a laugh or two.

Provide everyone something to connect with personally. Everyone engages differently with content. These multi-dimensional cards provide your different audiences with what they need, whether they

prefer to receive information visually, listening, reading or a combination.

Highlight all it takes to run your chapter. Members and other audiences don't often see all that goes on behind the scenes. These cards are an opportunity to recognize the volunteers, board members and sponsors who made it all happen. Publicly appreciate these individuals, while you also show that running a chapter is more than sending a few emails or setting up a breakfast.

Show the value of membership. Remind members of benefits they may have forgotten about, like event discounts, job boards and professional development. These reviews are a great place to share chapter wins that highlight value, like the dollars you awarded in scholarships thanks to dues revenue or donations you made to industry causes thanks to conference revenue.

Include what's to come

Build excitement with details around what you have planned for the next chapter year. Touch on new initiatives, volunteer opportunities and even new chapter swag. Include a simple call to action, so readers have an easy way to respond in the moment. "Join a committee," "Save the date for our spring conference," "Become a sponsor" and "Bring a colleague (or spouse) to our next event" can be all it takes to better engage a potential member, volunteer or sponsor.

These details can help reinvigorate members stuck in a rut, the ones who participate in the same chapter activities repeatedly. Year-in-Review cards may also help convince some who could be on the fence about renewing their membership to stay.

Highlight chapter wins, including not-so-obvious ones

Think beyond just mentioning the activities everyone will remember. Did you host a conference or event that exceeded expectations? Reach a sponsorship milestone, complete a community service project or launch a new educational program? Did your volunteers pull off something remarkable at the last minute, like replacing your conference venue after a waterpipe burst?

Include smaller wins, some of which may have a bigger impact than you'd expect. Did you hold a small workshop that received glowing feedback? Have a first-time volunteer lead a committee? These can be just as meaningful to members and are often the ones who make members feel more connected to your chapter.

Use numbers to strengthen your story

Statistics help make your accomplishments real. “We hosted 12 events” is a good statistic but “We hosted 12 events and welcomed more than 500 attendees” says much more. Include impactful figures like:

- New members added
- Membership retention rate
- Events hosted and total attendees
- Sponsorship revenue raised
- Volunteer hours contributed

Keep numbers short and scannable, with large, bold figures and a few words of content. (When was the last time you reviewed your chapter numbers and made sure they were the right ones to track? Accurate data can make what you share more compelling.)

Include engaging visuals

Visuals bring your narrative and data to life and better connect readers. Candid photos from your events are great and provide stronger engagement than staged photos. A volunteer spotlight with a video or photo montage with memorable moments can showcase your chapter’s personality. Consider a “Top 5 Highlights” section where you include members’ feedback capturing their most exciting moments, in bullets, with short copy in a different font that isn’t hard to read.

Thank those who made it all possible

Do your best to thank everyone who contributed: board members who gave their leadership, volunteers who gave their time, sponsors who gave their support, committees that did the planning and staff who kept everything running. Where possible, include names. “Thank you to our volunteers” is good, but shoutouts, to the committee chair who updated your advocacy program or the sponsor who stepped in to cover a funding gap, are more personal and your audience is more likely to remember them.

Include a note apologizing in advance for forgetting anyone. Provide an email address for people to submit names of people you didn’t mention, so you can share them in an update.

Distributing your virtual card

Email is the obvious starting point; embed the card or link to it prominently. But email shouldn't be the only way you share it. For larger distribution and a better chance someone will open and engage with the card, share it via multiple channels, and consider using shorter pieces on different channels. Post highlights on social media, in individual posts or a short series. Post the card on your website homepage or make it the lead story in your December chapter newsletter.

If you have the resources, create a video version, and pair it with a year-end message from your chapter leadership.

End your chapter year strong and visually

Before you send your typical holiday email greeting, review your chapter's accomplishments from this year. You'll probably find more than a few reminders that would be great for a visual year in review. A year-in-review holiday card lets you accomplish multiple things simultaneously: reflect on your achievements, celebrate your community, share your impact and inspire members and other audiences. It can also show people that their time, money and effort matters, this year, next and for the long term.