

# Understanding The Association Chapter Member Buying Journey: Why People Join



Think back to when you joined your association chapter. If you're like most, joining wasn't a quick decision. It took a bit to figure out what you wanted from an organization, and when you thought you found the right one, you did your research before handing over your money.



Each of those steps is part of a journey. In marketing, it's often called a purchasing journey or a buying journey. As it relates to association chapters, it's called the member buying journey, and it includes the steps and stages people move through before joining and becoming engaged members of a chapter.

Considering where member guests could be on their buying journey can help your chapter do a better job attracting and retaining members. Here are the four primary stages of the association chapter member buying journey.

## **Stage 1: Awareness – Discovering the chapter**

You won't get new members unless prospective members are aware that the chapter exists. They may hear about it peripherally through current members or chapter sponsors, social media (including member LinkedIn posts), industry events, and other local networks, but how can you do a better job getting your name out, having people remember it, and ensuring they know who to contact with questions about membership?



Strong, consistent chapter visibility is critical for success at this first step. Only when people hear about you regularly can they consider you on their membership journey. Ways to be visible include having an effective online presence and a presence in your local community. This can include LinkedIn chapter pages, an updated chapter website, regular blog posts by your board and members, and tables at local events; sending regular communications to members and member guests; and asking existing members to talk about your chapter to potential members. Remind members of the benefits of membership and share talking points, and, to get members more excited about talking to member guests about joining, hold challenges with prizes for people who make a certain number of membership-related connections.

### **Stage 2: Consideration – Evaluating membership value**

Once they know your chapter exists, their next step is to decide if it will provide the value they're looking for and is worth their time and investment. This is when they consider specifics, like how membership in your chapter can help their career; the type and value of your programming, services and resources, and your chapter's personality (which they'll have gotten a sense of from your online and in person visibility in Step 1).

To engage with people at this step, expand how you highlight your chapter's value in those areas. Hold events focused on answering questions from potential members and exploring the benefits of membership; networking opportunities that include pairing engaged members with potential members; and updating your website to include membership benefits and member stories/testimonials from existing members where they discuss why they became, and remain, members. These testimonials could also be useful at any membership-focused events.

### **Stage 3: Decision – Choosing to join**

Even if you give potential members the right information and do a strong job highlighting the value of your chapter, if you make it hard to join, you could still lose them. This step is critical — make it easy for people to join your chapter and become active members from the start, rather than having them jump through hoops to join and experience radio silence from your chapter once they submit their membership form and payment; this is when they should be hearing from your chapter regularly and often. Have a web page with clear pricing and benefits; create an easy sign-up process; take online payments; and provide a contact for questions. And don't wait to connect. Schedule a series of welcome emails



with information that will be useful at the beginning of their membership, like how to update their contact information, a list of volunteer roles that could be a good fit, and a schedule of upcoming events. Hold new member orientations throughout the year and send the dates early so they're more likely to put it on their calendar. (Don't forget to send reminders). Have an existing member reach out to new members to ask how things are going, ask if they have any questions, and offer to join them at an upcoming event. And when they attend their first event, introduce them to people to help them start to make connections early.

#### **Stage 4: Engagement – Turn new members into active participants**

It means nothing to your chapter to have members that don't engage, who open an email a few times a year or just attend your end-of-year social event. Members who are active have a much higher likelihood of remaining members for the long term and bringing in other members.

To better provide what your new members are looking for from your chapter, ask them what they want to gain from membership; start early. Ask in the initial membership form and follow up in emails and one-on-one conversations. Once you have that information, it's easier to:

- Find the right volunteer role for them. Check in regularly to see how they're doing.
- Provide leadership development opportunities for members who would make great board/committee members.
- Connect them with a mentor or mentorship cohort, to help them improve their hard and soft skills and get career questions answered as they arise.
- Hold events that match the goals of their membership, like a hackathon or an industry trivia night. Send personalized emails and follow up phone calls to help ensure they attend.

Focus on ways to help new members build relationships with other members. This provides a stronger chance of engaging them for the long term, as they'll want to attend events where they can spend time with these people.

#### **Increase membership and engagement across the member buying journey**

Each of the stages of the chapter member buying journey gives your chapter opportunities to be visible, to demonstrate value, and to engage with potential members. Develop a plan for executing each



of the stages of the chapter member buying journey gives your chapter opportunities to be visible, to demonstrate value, and to engage with potential members. Develop a plan for executing each step well, and ultimately, you'll find yourself with new members who will remain for the long term.

