

ASSOCIATION SUMMER TUNE-UP

The summer months tend to provide some relief for association managers as the pace slows down. Take advantage of the lulls while they last.

Here are five areas where associations can perform "tune-ups" so that when the busy season rolls around again, you are ready to hit the ground running:

Purge or archive

files: If you're like most association managers, you've been too busy throughout the year to keep on top of your files, especially those in your desk drawers and central filing cabinets. Use the "quiet" time to review and clear out stale-dated or non-essential files as well as consolidate filing cabinets. Archive files that may have historical relevance and move to offsite storage.

Audit your communications:

Invite all staff to visually scan the association's communications materials including newsletters, magazines and press kits. Place them on a large table

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THE ZEN OF HOW

association management, pure and simple

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Director of How???

ESSENTIENT
Association Management



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Whenever I meet someone for the first time and we exchange business cards, I get a quizzical look when they notice my job title "Director of How."

Allow me to explain.

Have you ever been in a situation where you or your colleague comes up with this really great idea that either has the potential to make you look really good, earn you or your organization more money or even fix a major problem?

In other words, you've come

up with the what, the who, the when, the why and the where. You just haven't figured out the how.

That's what I do.

Associations leaders are champions of "the great idea." Board meetings are incubators for great ideas. Association staff get to hear about these great ideas because often they're the ones who have to make the great ideas happen.

Unfortunately, sometimes making the great idea doesn't work because it requires

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How has technology impacted association management relationships?

Having worked for a number of associations over sixteen years, I have made some observations on the impact technology has had on association management. Here is a chronology based on my own personal experience:

1990 to 1995

In the early 90's relationships were cultivated and maintained via phone, fax and by mail. If you wanted to get a hold of someone at Queen's Park you phoned them. If you wanted to get some press, you faxed a press release and then phoned the news editor. If you wanted to get sponsorship support, you mailed a letter and then picked up the phone to

follow-up. When calling someone by phone, you could get them on the first attempt. Relationships with members were nurtured either in-person or over the phone. Meetings were face-to-face and were usually well-attended. The language we used tended to be a little more formal than it is today. If you left a message with someone, it was usually with a live person and the call was usually returned within 24 hours.

1995 to 2000

Broadcast fax and fax-on-demand made it possible for association managers to convey a message to a multitude of audiences. Because

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Performance Audit

“Appraisal of the performance of a system with reference to the overall objectives as well as efficiency of the means adopted to attain the objectives.” [UK National Audit Office]

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and review for consistency and clarity. Also, use the downtime to update your media contact database.

Clean up your procedures:

A lot can change in twelve months including your people, your processes and your procedures. Delegate follow-up to responsible program managers and facilitate a review to ensure that all procedures are accurate and up-to-date. Allow sufficient time to complete this task but make sure you set a deadline for the entire team. Celebrate completion with a staff lunch or barbecue.

Review calendars: Fall will be here

before you know it. Become familiar not just with your own calendar but

also those of all staff. As a group, review important dates that require planning and preparation, staffing and meeting space and pay special attention to potential conflicts in dates.

The summer months are great for tying up loose ends, clearing out the clutter and preparing for the challenges ahead. By making the best use of slower periods of time, association managers can be more effective during the busy fall, winter and spring months.



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resources and expertise that the association may not have. That's where I come in. Two of the greatest challenges that association managers have are a) meeting member needs and b) making the Boards' great ideas come to life. I know, I've been there.

As the aforementioned "Director of How", I break down what may be conceptual, into smaller chunks and figure out what is needed to achieve the "how." In other words, I take the strategic and convert it to tactical and operational so that the association can take "the great idea" to the next level.

Simple, and that's what I do.

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of automation, this facilitated communication at great speed and efficiency but without human interaction. Voice response systems along with call display features enabled anyone to screen calls and delay or deny interaction. Voice mail became an excuse for bad manners. E-mail and the "world wide web" became more mainstream and it was routine to ask someone for their e-mail address along with their phone number. E-mail evolved from being a distribution system for risqué jokes to the dominant method of communication we all know and understand today. By the end of the decade, almost everyone with a computer also had a e-mail address.

2000 to 2005

E-mail became the primary way to communicate. Meetings were held via teleconference, webcast and video conferencing. Conversations by phone or in person took a back seat to the

electronic medium. Websites became virtual brochures and electronic communities. Education delivery platforms included tele-classes and online training. All of these developments made it possible for employees to work from a home office or even from their car. PDA's, cell phones and wireless made it possible to stay in touch while on the road. They also made it impossible to leave the office behind. Communications became terse and devoid of grammar or punctuation and sometimes misunderstandings could occur.

Today

I have observed that over the years, while technology has made it possible for us to communicate more effectively and it has made the world a much smaller place, it has actually made us more isolated. In fifteen years, we have minimized the importance of human interaction in real time and replaced it with one-way conversations in alternating time zones. I have to admit,

however, that my association relationships over the years have benefited from technology. Technology makes it possible for me to have a business relationship with a member (or client), a bureaucrat or a supplier 2500 kilometres away. I think that this is extraordinary and I wouldn't have it any other way. But, I do know where to draw the line with technology and not to use it as a crutch or a shield. I pick up the phone or schedule a meeting in person when and where it is appropriate. For all my relationships, this shows that I care and keeps the relationship going strong. I believe technology has many advantages that can only benefit associations and their various relationships if managed well. If we don't abuse it or use it as a shield to hide behind, it can work in our favour.

And by the way, I would be the last person to slam technology and its impact on relationships. I met my husband through the internet after all.