

The Importance of Connecting with Members: The Three Ps Approach

Many industry associations and membership bodies are suffering significant financial pressures because of the 'Covid effect'.

There's lost revenue to contend with from postponed or cancelled events, but equally important is the struggle for membership retention and the ongoing revenue and sustained relevance that comes with engaged members who, in turn, help to attract new members.

This brief article focuses on what associations and membership bodies can do to:

- Better engage members.
- Make them feel loved.
- Encourage them to remain members when their own Covid-induced pressures may tempt them to close the cheque book.

Two drivers

Industry associations and other voluntary membership bodies usually rely heavily on two drivers to sustain membership (when there's not a legal or regulatory obligation):

- An emotional value proposition and connection – members 'feel proud' of their organisation and 'feel' it does positive things for them personally or career-wise. There's a sense of 'belonging'.
- A tangible connection – members can access specific and tangible benefits in terms of member-only products and services.

While both benefit packages are important, the more rewarding in the long-term (and the more cost-effective to implement) is the emotional 'feeling' connection. Members who feel proud of their organisation, who 'feel it does good things on their behalf' are more likely to:

- Remain members.
- Refer new members.
- Be inclined to accept higher subscription rates.

And this is especially true now, when members will be questioning their subscription spend and assessing the value they get for the cheque they write.

Making that connection: The importance of engagement

A large part of generating that connection with members is planned, managed, sustained and targeted engagement with them; engagement that:

- Understands and is specific to their needs and interests.
- Enables two-way interaction and that listens carefully and responds appropriately.
- Is timely and appropriate.
- Paints some kind of aspirational picture – that makes members feel there is a value-added purpose in their belonging to this organisation, other than the possible legal or regulatory obligation.

In other words, engagement that gives members a strong WIIFM to remain members.

This, largely, is the process of public relations.

It's the process of:

- Creating an awareness of value.
- Using that awareness to generate credibility.
- Leveraging that to build long-term, enduring and mutually-beneficial relationships.
- Leveraging the perceived value and credibility, and the relationship, to build trust.
- Using that trust and emotional connection to inspire in them the desired behaviours (continued support for the organisation).

Using the Three Ps approach

At The PR Company, we rely heavily on the Three Ps approach to devise and achieve effective membership engagement programmes. We focus on:

- Appropriate **Positioning for the organisation**. The association or membership body must be seen to act in such a way that it provides a perceived benefit to members, usually linked to an emotional response. Another way to think about 'positioning' is brand or reputation. The organisation's positioning in the minds of existing and potential members must reinforce the association's:
 - credibility and authority (in the sense that it is an influencer and can therefore help me/my industry)
 - relevance (in the sense that my membership of the association benefits me directly somehow)
 - attitude (in the sense that the association cares about ME).
- Effective and efficient **Promotion of the organisation**. This requires the planned, managed, sustained and targeted delivery of RACS messages and incentives – messages that are **Relevant** to the audience, **Actionable** (strong call to action/benefit), **Compelling** (what's in it for me), and **Simple** (the message gains cut-through quickly in a very cluttered space). So, all association messaging and communication (and tangible events and other member benefits) must reinforce the credibility, relevance and attitude goals above.
- Robust brand **Protection** to ensure the brand/reputation can sustain its positive positioning in the minds of the audience.

The above is more than just 'comms'. It's about strategic public relations, with clear and measurable objectives, a focussed strategy, an agreed workplan and a process for evaluating and reporting on results.

If you'd like to learn more about using the **Three Ps** to support your membership retention and growth strategies, call Daniel Paul (021) 400-993.

