

MEMBERSHIP OUR LIFEblood

Membership is the lifeblood of our organization and for good reason – it represents professionals who establish standards and ethics in a given organization.

That's why each year, our ALA National Officers are tasked with one very special goal: **TO INCREASE MEMBERSHIPS!** If our organization membership numbers have been flat or, if even worse, you are losing members, you may need some fresh ideas to pump up your numbers.

Start by putting yourself in the shoes of a potential member... Why would they join? What's in it for them? And for a new member, what would make them stay after their initial year?

There is definitely strength in numbers, so how can you give your membership count a boost? I've rounded up a few simple ideas that are easy to implement and will help to get your creative juices pumping during your next strategy session.

1. Market where your members hang out

If you're a professional business organization, advertise in an industry-specific publication, participate in LinkedIn discussions focused on topics related to your industry, or use social media to tweet about industry news using #hashtags that will generate followers or endorsers **Go where your members are** and you will be able to find new members/leads to mine.

2. Host events that professionals will want to attend.

Associations are known for their professional events – whether it is an annual expo, a quarterly lunch & learn or an online webinar. These types of professional events drive millions of attendees each year. **Make your events “must attend”** affairs by offering fresh speakers (those that have not made the rounds of every other industry event) and sought-after topics. You'll gain credibility and the opportunity to add additional members. A bonus idea: recruit new members by allowing attendees to bring a “guest”, gratis.

3. Have a membership drive.

Develop an annual membership drive and reward those who generate the highest number of new members.

4. Get feedback from current members.

How will you know what to improve upon if you don't know what is wrong? By asking your current member base for their opinions, you'll be able to adjust your membership benefits to appeal to the masses. **Create an annual member survey** to collect feedback. If the responses evoke a change in member benefits, make sure to broadcast this to your current members. They will not only be impressed that you've addressed their concerns, but they will likely spread the word to non-members. Plus, your new benefit perks will automatically elicit a positive response.

5. Keep existing members happy.

Increasing your membership count also means **retaining current members**. The fewer you lose, the easier it will be to reach your annual growth goal. New members, those within their first year of membership, are at the greatest risk for drop-off. For these members, develop a drip email campaign that will touch these members several times within the first year. For all other members, consider reaching out beyond email – at events, via direct mail or social media – to stay top-of-mind and to communicate continuing benefits.

6. Provide a personalized membership card.

By providing your new members with a **membership kit and card**, they will feel like they are a part of something special while being reminded of all the great benefits they will receive with their membership. A membership card can provide access to events, information and partner benefits (i.e. car rental discounts) and keep our organization top of mind all year long.

8. Begin the renewal process early.

Most members do not renew because they simply “forgot.” **Remind members early** (and often) to renew their memberships. It may take several “touches” before you’ll receive a response. Also, in your correspondence, remind them of all the great benefits that they receive (and what they’ll miss if they don’t renew).

9. “Join NOW!”

Create urgency by offering potential members a gift for joining on the spot. Maybe a Free dinner to your next event

As you can see, these ideas are simple, easy-to-implement and will help get your creative juices pumping for even more ideas! Sometimes you just need to ask yourself “what would entice me to join?”

If members are not engaged during your initial contact with them, how engaged do you think they will be months down the road? And before you know it, it is time for renewal and the member hasn’t participated at all....and won’t even consider sticking around.

So how do you make your members feel like they belong and get them to engage right off the bat? Well, for starters, mail them a member welcome kit. A printed membership kit not only delivers all the information that your new member needs, but it also communicates that you are investing in them and want them to be a part of something awesome. And unlike an email, your physical membership kit won’t get ignored in the mailbox. Physical mail is going through somewhat of a renaissance right now and people, especially millennials, prefer it over email.

A new member kit will:

- o **Make your new member feel like they belong**
- o **Provide the new member with everything they need to know about your association**

- **Help them to begin to engage with the association and other members**
- **Provide them with a membership card that will remind them of their association all year long and can be used to access member benefits both directly and through third-party partners**
- **Work like a marketing piece, as you can include just about anything you want that will promote membership and participation**

So now that you know that a membership kit is a really great idea, what can you include?

Welcome letter. This letter should hit on the topics that are most important to our organization. Maybe you want to stress what makes the organization unique and why it is worth joining (yes, they just joined, but renewal is less than 12 months away!), or maybe you want to stress why their participation is so important in moving the organization forward. Invite them to join committees, volunteer or join our online community. Again, this is your letter, your organization...you know what is most important here.

Membership card. Their card will not only represent our organizations brand well, it will function as a “companion card” to your online communication with your members. This card will serve as a continual membership reminder and allow easy access to member benefits.

List of Contacts. Include a complete list of officer contacts so that the new member can reach out to anyone at any time.

Calendar of Events. You don’t want your members missing out on the biggest events of the year. Annual conferences, lunch and learns, quarterly meetings....any events that members can attend (and participate in!)

Newsletter(s). You may want to include your current (or past) newsletter(s) to familiarize the new member with your association’s hot topics.

Brochures/Inserts. Use the member guide or a brochure that outlines member benefits that you’d like to include. You may have this online, but it doesn’t hurt to remind them why they joined in the first place!

Promotional Item. Some organizations like to include some swag (stuff we all get) that the member can keep on their desk or use every day. A nice reminder of their membership.

A promotional card. Include a second “membership card” on your welcome letter that is actually a referral card. When the member gives the card to a friend and then that friend joins, they both get a perk.

A new membership kit helps to start the conversation. It helps you communicate your association's goals, mission and values. And it is the first touch that your member will receive, so it should be a valuable, high-quality piece that properly represents our Organizations brand.

A new membership kit doesn't have to be a "one and done" deal. You can break it up and schedule a series of mailings to touch your members periodically...and remind them of all of the great perks they receive as part of their membership. You'll want to expand that communication online as well. Engaging your members on a regular basis, whether that's through an online social platform or a personalized email, all of these "touches" will help you develop a strong relationship with your members and keep them engaged long after they join.