

AN INTRO TO

Using Continuing Education to Enhance Membership Benefits

*An introductory guide to and how to succeed
at it*

Vocalmeet Inc.
**Next Generation Management
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Table of Contents

1. Introduction
2. Become a Reputable Source of Industry Information
3. Offering Professional Development or Certification Programs
4. Provide a Complete Management System with Technical Support and Resources
5. Opportunities to Network



Introduction



Introduction

In today's ultracompetitive market, professionals need to stay on top of evolving industry standards and practices. In many careers, simply having experience is no longer enough; industry professionals need concrete credentials and certifications to stay compliant.

Staying on top of these industry requirements can be difficult. That's where associations come in. As part of their membership packages, many associations now provide continuing education to their members. In fact, the proliferation of eLearning has made it so easy for associations to offer online courses and certifications that it's becoming part of the norm. Yet, standing out amongst the crowd is still possible for any association and continuing education can still be the key.

By offering high quality and flexible continuing education to members, an association can establish itself as a hub of industry information, professional development and member engagement. Doing this turns simple educational offerings into a true member benefit, helping the association in both attracting new members and retaining their old ones.

Introduction

Investigating the membership statistics of individual member associations across the United States reveals that membership renewals are about as important for associations as they are underserved by them. According to the Membership Marketing Benchmarking Report from Marketing General Incorporated In 2014, 76% of members renewed their membership with their respective association.

That means, for a variety of reasons, 24% of members left their associations that year. Surprisingly, that same report listed that only 30% of associations reported growth in their membership renewal numbers from the previous year. Clearly, there is some room for improvement in this area.

The reasons why members leave their associations are mixed, but, if only a small fraction of those members were retained each year by incorporating continuing education as a member benefit, that would be something worth exploring. Wouldn't it?



*Become a Reputable
Source of Industry
Information*



Become a Reputable Source of Industry Information

Setting up an association with continuing education courses says more to members and learners than it may appear at first. Whether it's intentional or not, an association that hosts professional development courses and offers industry certificates establishes itself as an industry expert.

Members will look to these associations for timely, accurate and relevant industry information. Providing this for members is as simple as posting industry news or press releases, linking useful content for members to read or even posting upcoming events that could be beneficial for them to attend.

This does not mean that the given association needs to be a complete one-stop shop, but providing members with important industry information instills in them the confidence in that their association is representing their best interests. Plus, members who are informed and engaged in their respective industries are more likely to contribute and participate in associational initiatives, a win-win for both sides.



*Offering Professional
Development or
Certification
Programs*



Offering Professional Development or Certification Programs

The most central member benefit of having continuing education through an association is the ability for members to take certificates and associated tests online. It's important that this system gives members easy and immediate access to the tests and certificates that they need, especially if these are needed to maintain a professional license.

The eLearning system should be automated and easy to use, as well as available for use on mobile devices. More people use mobile devices online than desktops, so it's crucial for online courses to be compatible in this format. In many cases, the more fluid and efficient the technology is the more affordable it is for users, another benefit for members. An ideal system should also be informative, keeping members aware about what certificates are necessary for the upkeep of their license, what additional courses might be beneficial for their professional development, and why and what career outcomes could be available to them upon completion.

The provision of information at this level not only helps members stay compliant in their industry but also positions the host association as a central hub within their respective industries.

Offering Professional Development or Certification Programs

Once an association has set up the ability to take courses online, it then must ensure that the necessary follow-up steps are taken care of as well. After members have completed a course or a certificate, for instance, allow them the ability to download the certificate of completion immediately or have it automatically emailed to them.

It might also be helpful to show members some possible next steps to better themselves and their career moving forward. This can be as straightforward as highlighting additional courses or certifications available to them or outlining career advancement possibilities, anything that tells them the association is looking out for its individual members.

4

*Provide a Complete
Management System
with Technical
Support and
Resources*

Provide a Complete Management System with Technical Support and Resources

To best satisfy members, it's important for an association to integrate its learning management system with its association management system. This will enable a member to sign in and track all the courses and certificates that are available to them at that time, even sending them notifications or alerts when something new is coming around the corner.

Providing members with the ability to upload any certifications or courses they received elsewhere will allow members use to track, store and maintain their completed credits all in one place. In addition to this type of account integration, a strong system will also have an area where members can view their purchase history, print receipts and customize their alert system.

It's important to provide members with an intuitive platform from course search through to course completion, but associations must also provide an appropriate level of technical support and resources as well. The more complicated the system is the more readily available the technical support needs to be. Having quick and helpful assistance on-hand for when a member is experiencing trouble online, such as adding a thorough tutorial or keeping a technical support line open, can mean the difference between retaining a member and losing them when it comes time for their membership renewal.



Opportunities to Network



Opportunities to Network

By offering continuing education and becoming an information hub, associations surround their members with their respective industry. Now, it's time for the association to surround the industry with its members.

Participating in, hosting and promoting conferences and industry events, both in-person and online, provides members with highly valued membership benefits. Giving them the chance to easily connect and participate in real and virtual forums and communities during these events goes a long way to keep members loyal and dedicated. This level of industry networking also provides the association with an increased presence in their industries.

One of the first steps should be to establish a social media presence and make connections with members. Use continuing education as a launching pad by offering a free course, for example. This transaction will both benefit current members and attract new leads for the association.

Opportunities to Network

Once an online network has been formed, the association now has an open channel for discussion, cooperation and promotion within its industry. Not only will members and learners be able to connect with each other, their peers and subject matter experts, but they will also be able to broadcast what their association and their continuing education system offers.

For the association, this increased presence in the industry not only helps stimulate membership growth in the future but also increases the both value of its continuing education programs and the value of its membership.

Get a Demo

We would be happy to talk more about your associations needs. Give us call or book a product demo.

Book a Demo

(866) 553-4540

