



Measuring Member Engagement

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There is a lot of emphasis these days on member engagement. Numerous articles have been written about engagement, task forces and committees have been set up to study it, and sessions at annual meetings are being devoted to understanding how to advance it.

Intuitively, it makes sense that associations would benefit from increased member participation in their sponsored activities, particularly those that generate non-dues revenue. Associations receive no additional benefit from “checkbook members”, whose only contact with the association occurs once a year when they pay their dues.

Calculating the return on investment of revenue generating activities is relatively straightforward, and most associations have directors who oversee those activities (e.g. continuing education, annual convention, member-get-a-member).

However, some researchers and association executives define member engagement broadly to include any form of contact that members have with the association, even if it does not generate additional revenue. Association executives are faced with the challenge of quantifying the benefits they receive when members participate in activities that have no direct connection to revenue, such as voting in the annual election, visiting the association’s website, participating in its social media, or contacting Member Services. Unless they know how they benefit from these activities, it is difficult to reconcile the effort and money invested in increasing member participation in these activities.

Unless the benefits derived from these non-revenue producing activities can be quantified, it is not only difficult to determine the ROI on efforts to increase participation, but determining how to prioritize its limited resources to increase participation is equally challenging. For example, is it more beneficial for the association to invest time and money to increase participation in social media, or to increase attendance at local chapter meetings?

This paper examines a variety of engagement activities, whether they produce revenue or not, from the perspective of how these activities correlate to member loyalty. Loyalty

is the term used to describe and measure the strength of the relationship between associations and their members.

We propose that all contact members have with their association affects their relationship with the association in some way, either positively or negatively. Positive experiences strengthen the relationship, and negative experiences weaken the relationship.

Over the years, it has been accepted that the stronger the relationship that members have with the association, the more likely they will be to:

1. renew their membership;
2. recommend the association to others;
3. generate non-dues revenue (meetings, continuing education, publications, premium benefits);
4. be understanding when there is a dues increase;
5. be forgiving when there are fluctuations in the quality of service;
6. speak highly of the association (positive word of mouth);
7. support the association's mission and initiatives;
8. become more engaged with the association;
9. donate their time and skills to advance the association's mission through volunteerism;
10. be an advocate for the association.

To address the current concerns, we examined association member survey data from a number of studies collected over the past three years, and we found that all forms of contact with the association (whether the activity generated additional revenue or not) did correlate to higher levels of member loyalty.

The actual results for each activity tested varied by association. Therefore, the results reported in the table below are average differences. For example, survey respondents who successfully recruited another member to join, were 50% more likely to be loyal to the association than members who did not recruit a new member.

Activity	Increase in the Likelihood of Being Loyal
Participated in association-sponsored continuing education	30%-110%
Brought in a new member	50%
Visited the association's website at least monthly	36%
Attended annual convention	35%
Volunteered at local or national level	21%
Attended local/chapter meetings	17%
Participated in association's social media	12%
Voted in annual election	8%
Contacted member services via phone or email	6%
Used association's member benefits	3% - 28%

The table shows a range for continuing education because of the different levels of participation for continuing education, and for member benefits because of the variety of products and services available.

For continuing education, those who purchased a minimal amount of their educational products from the association (1%-25%) were 30% more likely to be loyal to the association than those who purchased none of their requirements from the association. Those who purchased 100% of their CE from the association were 110% more likely to be loyal than those who purchased none of their CE from the association.

Because of the variety of member benefits available that could range from using an affinity credit card to getting assistance in running their business, a range of percentage increases was provided for member benefits.

The purpose of the table is not to show what each association can expect from a particular activity, but rather to illustrate that there are differences among activities, and those differences can be measured. Measuring an activity is a necessary requirement for managing the activity.

We are not suggesting that there is a cause-effect relationship between engagement and loyalty. It would be difficult to conclude from survey data whether individuals are more loyal because they are engaged, or they are more engaged because they are loyal. Also, there is likely to be a cumulative effect, as individuals who engage in one type of activity are prone to be engaged in multiple activities. For example, a member who volunteers is likely to attend local meetings, attend the annual convention, visit the website, and use member benefits.

While it appears that any type of contact or interaction between the association and its members has the potential to benefit both parties, the research shows that some types of interactions and activities are more beneficial to the association than others.

Correlating engagement to loyalty will enable an association to quantify the benefits of increased participation in various activities, even if there are no direct monetary outcomes to measure.

About the Author

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