

Association Sales & Marketing

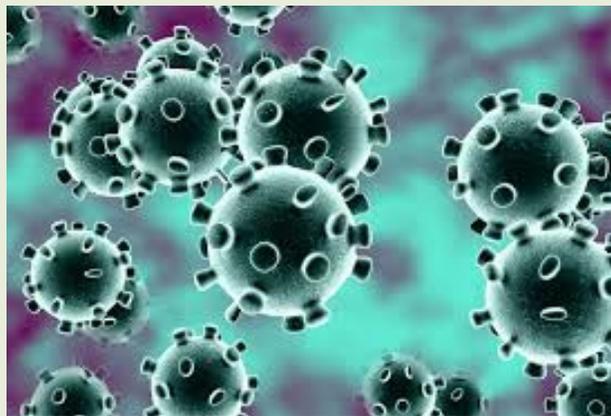
IDEAS FOR ASSOCIATION EXECUTIVES

Sales in the Time of COVID-19

The current health crisis in our country is forcing many companies to close their doors for the foreseeable future. Unfortunately, it is a real possibility that some may never be able to reopen. This presents a very real threat to American businesses and to all of the individuals who are employed by those businesses and rely on those jobs to support their families. It also presents a challenge to associations and to the stream of non-dues revenue upon which so many organizations depend. This is not the first time there has been an economic downturn in our country. However, I have never seen one that impacts every segment of our society as this one has, and that is projected to go on as long as the experts have warned us that this will. To say the least, these are unusual circumstances, and as extreme as they are, it is not the first time that economic downturns have put pressure on the association community to adjust their goals and re-evaluate the business practices.

What are people doing if they have been laid off or furloughed from their job because of mandated business shutdowns? They should be doing everything they can to conserve their cash so that they have the money available to pay their

bills. They are doing everything they can think of to hold on to their cash so they have as much of it as possible to meet their obligations until they are able to go back to work and their cash flow once again improves. In short, they are limiting their spending on all but the most essential items.



Businesses are no different. When an economic downturn reduces a company's sales, most companies react in nearly the same way as if they, too, were "laid off." They do everything they can to conserve cash so the company can survive until sales improve. They look for the most cash intensive expenses which can be reduced. In many cases, this translates

into staff layoffs because that has the effect of near immediate major reductions in cash expenditures. They next look at other areas which can be reduced to conserve cash and one of the most obvious is to reduce or cancel advertising and marketing purchases. These companies will say that the reduction in their sales puts them in the position to have to reduce marketing expenses because they don't have the money to pay for them. In the short term, this is true.

I have been through a number of economic downturns in my career and seen sales suffer as a result. In the last downturn, I remember speaking

to a major supplier of a product utilized throughout the industry served by my association. He cancelled his advertising and told me that he had a warehouse full of products that were not selling and until he could convert those goods to cash, he had no way to pay for any advertising. I, of course, told him that the best way to empty his warehouse was to advertise the products, but his response was that no amount of advertising was going to increase demand for a product that was not being utilized because of the financial health of the industry he served. But what was he doing to assure that once the economy improved, his product would be the first ones purchased?

The answer to this question is the role that advertising plays today. For those selling adver-

tising space, the pitch is no longer about utilizing advertising to sell products or services. It is about companies advertising to maintain brand awareness, increasing their visibility, and helping them retain market share when the cash flows once again. By rethinking your advertising sales strategy, you will be in the position to regain the ad dollars that have been lost and yours will be the publication of choice for industry suppliers when they once again have the financial ability to purchase advertising. So, don't stop selling. Sell harder by delivering a different message. In this issue of our newsletter, I am going to suggest some ways you can do this including a discussion of the important role that establishing and maintaining a social media community is to your sales program.

Using Social Networking as Part of Your Sales Strategy

An important element to the successful management of the sales process is regular communication with your customers and prospects. Keeping your name in front of your customers is a proven way of retaining relationships with those with whom you do business. This is not new. What is new, however, is that there are now more tools than ever that are available to enable you to do this. Much has been written about integrating social networking tools into your customer relationship strategy. Steven Tylock, a well-known author on the use of web and social media strategies states, "If there is any technology tailor-made for a profession's natural talents, it's social networking and sales. Sellers, after all, are communicators. And social media lets them reach out—and then reach out some more."

The use of such sites as



LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook are really nothing more than channels with which to communicate with your audience. They are a path that you should be using to connect with your audience of advertisers, exhibitors, sponsors, and prospects. With these tools you can attract people to your web site, social media site, podcasts, or blogs, share information, and promote your products and events. They allow you to reach a broader audience than ever before and deliver to them specific information targeted to their areas of interest. This is all good, but only takes advantage of a fraction of all that social networking can and should be doing for you. Let me offer a suggestion.

Your customers, their customers, your members, and you are all part of a community. And there is no better way to build and maintain a community of widely dispersed members than through the use of social network-

ing tools. A true community openly invites two-way communications and this is where you can develop the full potential that web and social media technologies offer. For instance, you could create a group of exhibitors and invite them to post questions or comments about your last convention. Ideas could be exchanged between participants as well as comments, criticisms, and suggestions could be shared with your organization's exhibits staff.

This takes the concept of the annual exhibitor's meeting and extends it to become a community of people with similar interests. Your first reaction to this might be that you don't want unhappy exhibitors publicly posting their feelings. But, if you are managing the conversation, the appropriate member of your staff could address those criticisms in a positive way, discuss the steps you have taken to assure that the same issues do not occur at future events, and therefore, show the

community that you are open and responsive to the issues raised by your exhibitors. This is also called customer service, an art form that many say has been lost.

Advertising sales could also benefit from the establishment of a community of advertisers and industry suppliers. Invite your magazine and web advertisers to share with each other the types of advertising messages that were most effective in reaching the audience your association delivers. I recently sold an ad in an association magazine in which about 70% of the readers are



female. The advertiser submitted ad material that was clearly targeted to a male audience. I called the advertiser to advise them of this mismatch and as a result, they submitted different material. I could see where a community of advertisers, who willingly shared what worked and what didn't, could have avoided the problem for this advertiser. I am not naïve and I understand that companies competing with each other would not willingly share this type of information in a public forum. But, non-competing companies may gladly share their experiences with each other. It is an open invitation

for all stakeholders to feedback, tips, and other information that could benefit everyone.

An association is really a community of people with similar interests and the community is stronger when its members have dialogues with each other. Social networking is one more tool that sales managers should be regularly using to maintain communication and create a feeling of community with all customers and prospects. It is, in fact, another value-added service that can put you ahead of your competition.

Include Content Marketing In Your Value-Added Offerings

There is a rapidly growing trend in the publishing community to create content that recognizes the important role that industry suppliers play in the industry or profession they serve. But, this is balanced by a concern among association publishers about how this content is created and presented and the effect it may have on the editorial integrity of media products.

Associations are in the unique position of having to create highly credible content that delivers valuable information to their members. Also, associations are unique in that they have multi-faceted relationships with their industry's suppliers—not only as advertisers, but also as members, exhibitors, sponsors, and, in some cases, committee and board members.

So, how does an association balance the increasing demands from advertisers for more coverage than just the ad space they are purchasing against the needs of the members to read timely and credible content about the association and its activities? With a unique balanced approach to the creation of content that supports the needs of advertisers without it appearing to be free advertising.

We have developed an editorial model that perfectly meets this need. We take an editorial approach that is viewed from the perspective of the member rather than the supplier. Our approach describes an

issue or problem from the members' point-of-view and then seeks suppliers who can provide solutions to this problem and ends with a description of how the implementation of the solution worked. Simply put, it's not about the company but is about the customer.

We also recognize that there should be some rules that define how content marketing editorial should be created and presented. These rules are as follows:

- The content should not be written by the association's editorial staff
- The article should be clearly identified as "advertising content"
- The article's title should not be included in the table of contents
- The article should be designed with a typeface and page style that is different than the editorial content of the publication and should appear in the second half of the publication

With experience producing this type of content for association publications, we work with your ad sales staff to identify key advertisers and suppliers who should be contacted for inclusion in the article. We contact each and ask them to take the "case study"

approach to how one of the association's members utilized a solution offered by this company and then how the problem was successfully resolved.

We also recognize that a company that is a large supporter of the association as an exhibitor or sponsor may not want to participate in this product. With each association's guidance, we will still include this company's information in the article. That is what makes our program different than most such editorial solutions. Just because a company elects to not advertise doesn't automatically mean that they should be excluded from the project. We recognize and respect the unique relationships that associations have with the supplier community and work to assure that those

relationships are enhanced.

To learn more about how our unique approach to the development of content-based special advertising sections can work for your organization, contact us today for a no obligation discussion about how content marketing can become a major tool to increase ad revenues by attracting new advertisers while providing increased value to your current advertising community.

To see a sample of our approach to content marketing visit our website at: www.adsalesexperts.net/contentmarketing.html.

Six Steps to Take Now To Prepare for Future Sales

If you want a vigorous advertising program, conduct a thorough check-up on everything from your competitive position to identifying your cross-selling opportunities.

It won't be long before many advertisers and their agencies begin to plan their advertising and marketing budgets and schedules for the rest of this year. Now is the best time to step back and take a hard look at your association's sales program. To be fully competitive, you as an association executive, must have the necessary information, tools, and sales systems in place to earn your fair share of the advertising dollars that will be spent in the months and year ahead.

Here's an overview of the major steps a thorough review should include.

1. Start with a competitive analysis.

This can be a formal or informal review of the market in which your association's products operate, the publications and Web sites against which you compete, and how those competitors do business in the marketplace. As part of your analysis:

- Compare your magazine's circulation and demographic distribution to your competitors'.
- Identify segments of the market that are unique to your membership so you can focus your sales efforts on those companies.
- Check competitors' editorial calendars to determine the subjects they're covering as well as industry trade show bonus distribution opportunities.
- Adjust your ad rates as necessary to retain your competitive position in the market while fine-tuning to cover increases in printing, paper, and postage costs.

2. Review the structure of your sales organization.

- Determine the size of your list of active advertisers and prospects.
- Is your association using a CRM technology to provide the best management of the sales process? If so, are you using it to its fullest capacity?
- Determine if you can sell advertising effectively by telephone or if the market has come to expect personal sales calls. You may want to consider establishing a territorial structure in which each geographic territory is serviced by a salesperson.
- Consider the pros and cons of using the services of an independent advertising sales representative

(providing regional or national coverage) versus conducting the program with dedicated staff. Or think about using a combination of sales methods. A more targeted and dedicated approach to the sales process may produce significantly better results from both established advertisers and new clients.

3. Be sure you're making your editorial and events calendars work for you.

Advertising agencies expect to see your editorial calendar for the coming year in the fall. If you haven't already done so, now is the time to identify editorial subjects for each issue as well as for issues that will be distributed at major industry events (yours and others').

For advertisers, the editorial calendar has become an increasingly important tool for determining the publications and issues in which they will place ads. Without that information, they may not include your publication on their master advertising schedule for the coming year. Once budgets are set, it is very difficult to persuade advertisers to add your magazine later.

4. Develop an overall tactical marketing plan to support your ad sales efforts.

The purpose of this plan is to support your sales staff by keeping your magazine's name in front of your customers and prospects prominently and regularly.

The editorial calendar is a key ingredient of your marketing plan. Once you have the calendar, you can see where you have sales pegs linked to a segment of your industry; bonus distribution at a major industry event; or a special issue featuring an anniversary, tradeshow, or a buyer's guide. From there you can plan to promote these issues with targeted, e-mails, social media promotions, and sales calls.

Remember: Your magazine must remain visible to the advertising community throughout the year. Developing and executing a tactical marketing plan is essential for success.

5. Review cross-selling opportunities.

Web advertising, sponsorships of events, advertorials, and ancillary products—if properly developed—continues to be fertile ground for growth. Packaging print and Web advertising as a multi-media solution for advertisers has become increasingly popular with publishers. Some associations have seen success from cross-branding their magazine and industry trade show.

The most valuable selling point is to tell advertisers that you offer a continuum of advertising opportunities: They can reach the market today with a Web ad, this month with a print ad, and this year through your organization's face-to-face events.



6. Never lose sight of your competition

Even though yours is an association publication, do not forget that you compete with commercial publishers. Assessing your ad sales program from a commercial perspective will give you a better understanding of how your magazine is perceived and help you modify your sales program to be more responsive to market changes. This kind of attention to your program is essential if you're serious about increasing non-dues revenue.

Who We Are

Robert Silverstein, Principal. Robert has over 30 years of experience in all aspects of publications and tradeshow sales and management. He has worked for both commercial and association publishing organizations and has led national sales teams which have consistently exceeded their sales goals. He has also been an active member of the association community including serving as Chair of the ASAE Communications Section Council and has been a frequent speaker at ASAE and other industry events. In addition, Robert is an adjunct member of the faculty at the University of Maryland where he teaches courses on marketing and sales management. Robert can be reached at: rsilverstein@adsalesexperts.net, by visiting www.adsalesexperts.net, or calling 240-498-9674.