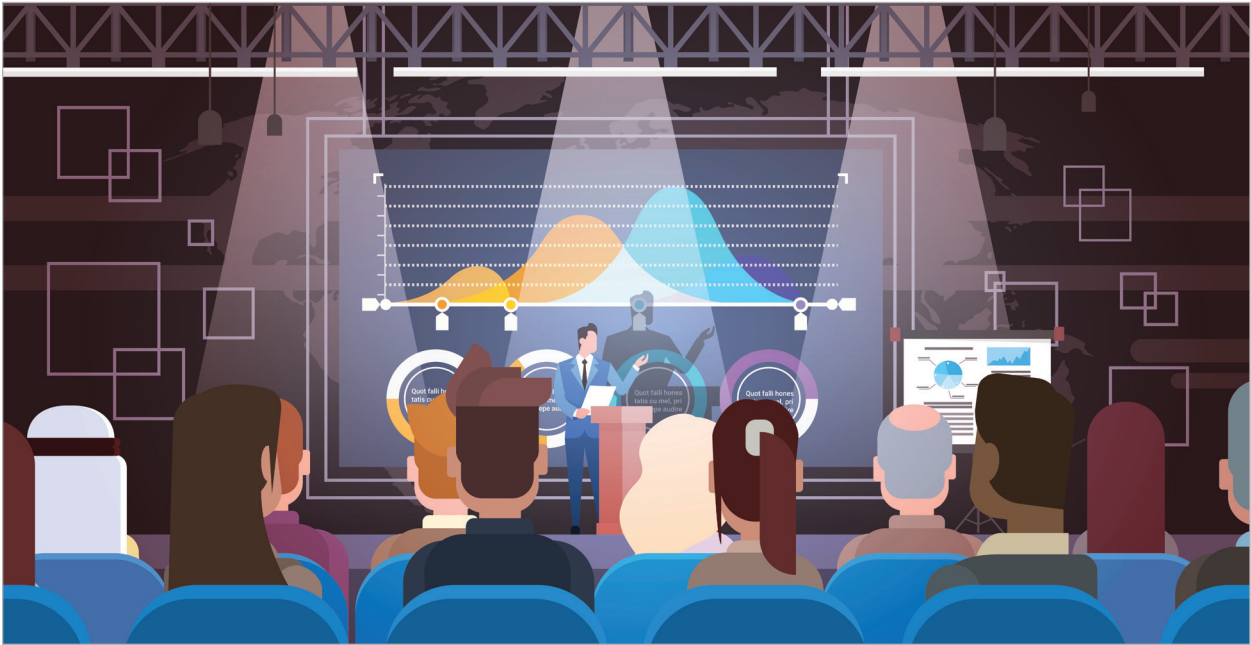


Recruiting New Members at Your Events

MARKETING MEMBERSHIP TO ATTENDEES BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER YOUR EVENT



Introduction



Conferences and events are the centerpiece of many associations' annual activities and a highlight for both members and prospects that attend. These prospects are the "warmest" membership leads. They already believe your event is worth their time and money, so they'll likely be a receptive audience to your membership recruitment efforts too.

In order to successfully recruit and market the value your organization offers, it is imperative to have a strategy in place to ensure their nonmember experience sets the right foundation and gives them a taste of what they could be getting with a membership.

Read on to learn ideas you could be leveraging to market membership to your attendees before, during, and after your events.

Before Your Event

Offer an Event Registration/Membership Package

Some associations offer an event registration package that includes one year of membership. Attendees who select this option pay the member rate for the event and sometimes get a discount on membership dues too.

The package approach is a sneaky way to get around a common barrier to joining: employers who pay for professional development, but not for membership.

Some associations force non-members to purchase a registration package that includes one year of membership. However, this recruitment tactic raises anti-trust issues since you're requiring membership for event attendance.

With the registration/membership package approach, your recruitment numbers will look good, but your retention rate for these new members might suffer—around 30 percent, according to association consultant Ed Rigsbee. The consensus on ASAE Collaborate from dozens of ASAE members confirmed Ed's findings: because these new members joined only for the registration discount, they didn't value association membership itself and dropped out at renewal time.

If you decide to try this approach, develop a new member engagement plan specifically for these attendees. You need to engage them differently throughout their first year since they joined for a different reason than most members.

Start Membership Marketing Before the Event

After they register, invite non-members to join your association. Provide a membership incentive, such as an exclusive invitation to a

members-only event during the conference. Tell them how membership will improve their professional life. Focus on the impact, not the features, of membership.

Make your invitation personal, if possible. Ask to schedule a time to meet during the event. If you have a membership booth or lounge at the event, you could arrange to meet them there.

Prepare First-Time Attendees

Start building a sense of community, trust, and value that will serve as the foundation for a great member and prospect experience.

- ***First-timer event page, tip sheet and blog posts.*** Gather all your first-time attendee resources in one place on your website. Leverage email and social media to share these resources. Even returning attendees will find this page useful.
- ***"Know before you go" webinar.*** Host a live webinar that introduces first-time attendees to event basics. Use a platform that offers a chat feature so viewers can ask questions or talk among themselves. Post the recording on your first-timer page.
- ***Online community.*** Create a discussion group in your online community for first-time attendees. Ask staff or volunteers to moderate the discussion and answer questions.
- ***Event buddies.*** During registration, ask returning attendees if they would be interested in serving as an event buddy for first-timers, and ask first-timers if they would like an event buddy. Make matches based on career stage, age, specialty/interests, and/or position. Ask the buddy to reach out to their first-timer before the event to arrange a meetup for the first day.

During Your Event

The longer the event, the more opportunities you'll have to hook your prospect. But even at brief luncheon events, you can take advantage of some of these tactics.

Put the Name Badge to Work.

Put prospect badges in a colored transparent badge holder so staff, volunteer leaders, and membership ambassadors know at a far-away glance who's a member and who's not. Or, add a distinctively colored "Guest" ribbon to the name badge.

Recruit a group of volunteer membership ambassadors who make a point of welcoming guests, introducing them to others, and assessing their interest in membership.

Invite Non-Members to Special Events

Invite non-members to new member or first-timer orientation sessions, breakfasts or receptions at the event. They'll hear about the benefits of membership and get a chance to meet other members, including veteran members and membership ambassadors.

If you want to give additional attention to some of your membership prospects, ask your volunteer leaders or ambassadors to invite them to a members-only event.

Work Your Leads at a Membership Booth

Have a membership booth on the show floor—and elsewhere in the venue when the expo hall is closed. Ask volunteers to take short shifts in the booth, and



have someone from staff there at all times. Keep a FAQ on hand so everyone can answer questions. Make sure you have a laptop connected to the web so attendees can browse resources and join the association on the spot.

You'll need a hook for your booth—some way to attract the attention and interest of people passing by. This hook will depend on your attendee profile, other attractions on the floor, your allotted space, and, of course, your budget.

- Relaxation: hot and cold beverages, snacks, comfy chairs and tables in a lounge-like atmosphere
- Massage therapists: chair massages
- Photographer: head shots

During Your Event (Cont.)



Make It Easy to Join on Site

Your AMS member portal is always open for business, but attendees have lots to do, so make joining a quick process. The information they provided during registration is in your AMS—how much more do you really need at this point? Get additional data during onboarding. All you really need is their dues payment—make sure you have a secure way to process that.

However, if your AMS doesn't have an event registration solution or an open API that integrates with your event management software, then the prospect's information is likely not in your AMS. In that case, keep the membership application as short as possible. Or, scan their badge with a lead tracking tool or collect their business card and do the data entry later.

Consider giving the new member credit for the difference between the member and non-member registration rates. They can apply that credit now to membership or apply it toward a future purchase or registration.

Create a Welcoming Experience for First-Time Attendees

- **Welcome gift.** Surprise and delight first-timers. Give them a gift card for a café in or near the venue. Or, ask them to pick up an association-branded gift on their way home.
- **Ambassadors.** Ask veteran members to act as ambassadors for first-time members. Instruct them to look for event newbies in the registration area, welcome them, and show them around, making introductions along the way. If it's a multiple-day event, ask ambassadors to check in with first-timers again on the second day.
- **VIP seating.** If space permits, save some VIP seats for first-timers in the front rows at keynotes or at a table with board members or ambassadors during breakfast or lunch.
- **Structured networking.** Instead of only scheduling "open networking time," association consultant Amanda Kaiser recommends scheduling some structured networking time too—guided discussions with a purpose. She says open networking can be "awkward for potential and new members. Friends gravitate to friends leaving first-time attendees and non-members feeling like they are the only one in the room who do not know anyone."

First impressions are often lasting impressions. Don't let event newbies stand alone. Make sure they feel welcomed from the start.

After Your Event

Develop a post-event email campaign for non-member attendees.



Make these emails relevant by segmenting the list by career stage, specialty, or interests. Don't send hard-sell recruitment messages. Instead, demonstrate the value of membership by sharing relevant informative and educational content.

Make these emails personal, if possible. If you met the attendee at the event, refer to your conversation. Learn about their experience and suggest future engagement possibilities based on what you know about their needs and interests to continue building on the foundation you've set at the event.

Take this opportunity to ask them why they chose to pay a higher price for registration instead of becoming a member. Ask for feedback on their event experience too.

You could offer a free 30-day membership and suggest members-only resources they might be interested in, if you can find out what type of sessions they attended.



CONCLUSION:

Implementing a strategy to market membership to prospects attending your events before, during and after a conference or meeting is the first step to maximize the face-to-face time you will get with your "warmest" membership leads.

Take advantage of this opportunity with a well-established plan to start building a sense of community, trust, and value that will serve as the foundation for a great prospect and future member experience.

Leveraging an all-in-one AMS that offers email marketing, event management, and open API integration capabilities is critical to enable your organization to recruit prospects at your events.

We'd love to show you how our event management solutions can help you.

Contact us to get started.

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