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HOW TO REMAIN EFFICIENT WHILST CATERING TO GLOBAL MEMBERSHIP NEEDS

A DILEMMA FOR ASSOCIATION LEADERS TODAY

OVER THE PAST FEW CENTURIES, ONLY A FEW EMPIRES COULD CLAIM THAT THE SUN NEVER SET ON THEIR GLOBAL DOMAINS. A GREATER NUMBER OF TRULY WORLDWIDE ENTITIES ARE ACTIVE IN TODAY'S GLOBALIZED WORLD - IN PARTICULAR ASSOCIATIONS WITH INTERNATIONAL MEMBERSHIPS. HOWEVER, INTERNATIONALLY-FOCUSED ASSOCIATIONS OFTEN FACE THE ONGOING CONSTRAINTS OF LIMITED FINANCIAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES - MORE LIMITED THAN FOR OTHER INTERNATIONAL BODIES SUCH AS MULTINATIONAL COMPANIES.

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Association staff feel increasingly under pressure as they take on more and more responsibility for an enormous range of tasks necessary to support and engage their memberships. They usually have to serve members globally in different time zones from one single office, and need to organize major meetings on various continents. Often it is crucial that staff deal with very technical issues and there is the additional, constant need to be able to overcome cultural differences and language barriers. All this seems to be virtually impossible with a staff of between 5 and 20 people, but it is precisely the framework in which most global associations evolve every day.

Of course, the availability of **modern communication technologies** makes it possible for associations to be in regular contact with their members. But an association - of any kind - is not simply about receiving emails or participating in teleconferences. For an association

to live, good old face-to-face contact between members and association staff is vital. No amount of new technology can replace this vital link.

To stay close to their **global membership**, many associations create local chapters of members and subsidiary offices. But such a solution can prove costly, as it increases administrative costs; negative competition between offices can be another unwelcome result.

To overcome these potential difficulties, some global associations engage **association management companies** with offices worldwide to handle the local chapters. This solution allows for a clear control of costs engaged, is fully flexible in terms of staffing, and allows for a clear assessment of activities undertaken as well as clear and flexible reporting lines. It also allows members to benefit from the services of dedicated professionals with a wide range of spe-

cializations. Further flexibility can be assured by allowing for the relatively easy opening and closing of offices, as required by the changing needs of a particular association.

The drive for associations to provide ongoing, consistent added value to each and every member whilst remaining resource efficient in a global environment is the major challenge facing our industry in the 21st century - but there are indeed solutions to the dilemma!

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