

YOUR ASSOCIATION AND WEB 2.0

WEB 2.0. THIS GEEK-TERM IS BUZZING IN EVERYONE'S EAR THESE DAYS AND CAN BE FOUND POPPING UP IN NEWSPAPERS, MAGAZINES, NEWS PROGRAMS AND WEB SITES GALORE. BUT HOW DOES WEB 2.0 IMPACT YOUR ASSOCIATION? EVEN MORE IMPORTANTLY, HOW CAN YOU MAKE WEB 2.0 ONLINE TRENDS WORK FOR YOU AND HELP YOUR MEMBERSHIP THRIVE?

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IT'S ALL ABOUT THE CONVERSATION

The concept of Web 2.0 is essentially the idea that the online world is a dynamic and interactive place, brimming with knowledge to be shared and relationships to be made. Web 2.0 savvy sites are now creating communities of people - connecting humans with humans and allowing humans to connect with the information they seek - instead of serving visitors with static pages of stagnant data and sending them on their way.

Open and honest association-membership interaction is key in this new participatory phase of the Internet. Forward-looking organizations are using their online presence as a conversation tool to promote member-generated content, to gather members' feedback and new ideas and to put organizational emphasis where it truly lies: the members!

Online technologies like blogging, podcasting, comments, Wikis and RSS feeds, pave this two-way street of communication and provide your organization with the tools to grow your organization and increase activity and excitement among your membership.

YOUR MEMBERS - SHOW SOME LOVE TO YOUR ASSOCIATION'S MOST VALUABLE ASSET

Web 2.0 is a powerful online movement only because of the high rate of user participation and interaction. The same goes for your association and your association's Web site. Without your members, you would have no organization. Without making your members

an integral part of your Web site's content creation and interactive community, your Web site is only a series of stagnant pages offering minimal value and interest to your association.

So how do you take advantage of your association's most valuable asset (your members)? Open your site to their brain power, experiences and feedback. Here are just a few basic ideas to turn your Web site from 'blah' into an interactive community:

1. Allow your members to create and post relevant articles. This encourages member contribution and adds great new content which helps your ranking in search engines!

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2. Record your meetings, speakers at conference events or training seminars and podcast / vodcast them on your site. Podcasts (and their video brethren, vodcasts) are a great way to reach out to members in other physical locations and serves as a special benefit to new members who may not have been around to hear that great speaker or event.



3. Start an association blog using active members of your association as authors. Fresh and frank blog posts (which could cover anything from upcoming association activities to industry-related happenings) keep members coming back to your site regularly to check for new content. For new voices and ideas, rotate your blog authors or look for occasional

guest authors from your organization to spice things up a bit.

4. Open a rating or commenting system for your Web site content.

Including a 'rate this' feature on articles, releases and other contents allows you to receive valuable membership feedback. Not only will your members' voices and opinions get heard, but you may get lots of great ideas and open up a whole new avenue for member discussion.

5. Shoot and share event photos.

Encourage your members to share their event and meeting photos by posting them to online photo sharing sites (like Flickr) and tagging them with key terms related to your event. You can stream these photos to your site, adding interesting and frequently updated content - plus, photos are a huge traffic draw to any site, so you'll be guaranteed some extra member visitors.

6. Incorporate a wiki for collaboration purposes.

Follow-up your next big meeting or conference with a wiki for members to contribute their notes and thoughts on. Collaborate on documents, press releases, outlines, etc. - the possibilities are endless! Wikis can be password protected, so you can restrict access to certain groups of people, or keep things open for everyone's thoughts.

Allowing your members such a prominent voice on your Web site can be scary at first - to some degree, you are relinquishing direct control and this can be daunting! But a move towards an open and participatory online community can do wonders for generating excitement for your association, keeping current members happy and up-to-date and enticing new members to join.