

An Offer They Can't Refuse



An Unconventional Approach to Growing Membership

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Squeaky Wheels and Cutting Grass

Recruiting more members can seem complex and difficult. There are hundreds of tactics you could implement in the hope of growth- direct marketing campaigns, organic social media, paid social media, lead magnets, a website revamp, mini-events, big events, online communities, outbound sales, SMS campaigns ... the list goes on.

But, if you take a step back and think about it, there are really only two things you need to do to recruit more members:

- 1) Get their attention.
- 2) Give them a reason to join.

Of these two, associations tend to focus on getting attention. It's that list of a hundred things to do and campaigns to run in order to grow membership.

And all that is a lot of work! The complexity and possibilities capture our attention. *The squeaky wheel gets the grease.*

The problem is that, getting prospective members attention is only half the problem.

Your membership offer is the other half.

And you don't put the same amount of energy into developing effective offers because offers are not squeaky wheels. They live on member benefits pages and marketing collateral and are "once and done."

If you put all your energy into the squeaky wheel of capturing attention you're missing a big opportunity to grow.... Because most associations do a poor job of pitching membership.

When you invest all your money and time in getting attention and ignore your membership offers, it's like you're cutting your lawn with scissors. And when you want to get it done quicker, rather than buying a lawnmower, you get a couple more scissors and have your kids join you outside snipping grass.

Really?

A year ago, I sat across from an executive director at CalSAE's industry and association speed dating event. I told her that my company, Resurgent, helps associations and professional societies drive growth through more effective websites.

"Really?" she said, "Growing membership through a website?"

"Yes."

She didn't bother to hide her skepticism, "...I just don't see that as the website's job."

We had an interesting little chat about how websites can better serve associations.

Not long after that conversation, Resurgent launched a redesign of a website for a professional society. Though traffic to the website stayed the same, *their new members increased by nearly 400%.*

It was like we turned on a water spigot of new members and it has been pouring members into their society ever since.

What was the difference?

Though we made lots of improvements to drive growth, one of the key changes was ...(drumroll)...

We did a better job of selling membership with more effective membership offers.

2 Unfortunately Common Mistakes

Your offer is a point of leverage to generate more members, but associations make two really common mistakes that sabotage the effectiveness of their offers.

- 1) They treat their website's member benefits page as an explainer page.
- 2) They don't speak to anyone in their offer.

Your Member Benefits Page is a Sales Page, Not an Explainer Page

Your website is a key strategic asset for your organization. Anyone who has any interest in you or a question about you will go to your website first. That includes potential members who want to evaluate membership.

The problem is that most execs believe that your member benefits page is where you explain what you do for members:

- What magazine they get.
- What benefits program savings offer.
- What legislative work the association does on the member's behalf.
- What their discount is to the conference.

Your member benefits page is not an explanation of what benefits members receive, *it's a sales page*. Membership is your product.

If you were an e-commerce company that only had one product, you would not bury the sales page for that product in your website navigation. And you would make absolutely certain that your product page was a highly persuasive page that effectively sold that product.

Your member benefits page needs to be a highly polished version of your offer to new members. *It's more important than almost every other page on your website.*

Assuming prospective members arrive on your member benefits page, then the second common mistake occurs....

You Need to Speak to Someone to Sell Them

In 9 out of 10 associations, there is only one membership offer.

In that offer, you focus on yourself:

- The activities you do for members.
- The stuff you give members.
- The discounts you offer members.

"Now, wait a second," you might be thinking, "that list is all about what we do for members."

Except it's not. It focuses on you, not on them. None of that relates to any particular person.

For example, consider your magazine as a benefit. What does your magazine mean to your members? If you've got some marketing acumen, you might think about its benefits rather than its features and say, "It helps our members stay up to date."

Okay, that's not bad. But what does that mean exactly?

- For one type of member, staying up to date is important because to remain gainfully employed they have to know what's going on in the industry (e.g. technology, medicine.)

- For a supplier member, it's an intelligence asset to get into their prospects' minds- to see what your members care about so that they can position their services or products as serving those needs.
- For one of your retired "honorary" members, it may be a way to make them feel connected to the field and have something to talk about with their peers.

The problem is that your offer doesn't say any of that. It doesn't talk about your member's goals, desires, and pains and your association *in relation* to those needs.

Instead, you take a menu approach to sales. You list all the ways you think you provide value and hope that whichever of these prospective members sees your offer will decode that value from that big menu.

It doesn't work. If just listing benefits and features and saying, "please find me valuable," was an effective tactic then advertising and sales wouldn't exist as occupations.

You can't rely on members to figure out why you matter in relation to their goals- you need to connect the dots and tell them.

That means you need to speak to a specific kind of member to effectively sell them: a student, a young professional, a manager, a specialist, an educator, a partner industry, a doctor, a nurse, an honorary member, a supplier.

Your membership is not homogeneous. The more generic your offer is, the more you try and speak to everyone, the weaker it becomes.

You need to focus your offer and speak to one specific kind of member at a time.

But in order to do that, you must first understand them.

Silicon Valley Wizardry

Communicating value to members can be extremely difficult. If it is for you, it's a sign that you may not understand members as well as you should. Because when you know what someone truly values, it's not hard to put that information into words.

You probably know a tremendous amount about your members. But if you can't effectively answer the question of why you're valuable to them, you have a blindspot in how you collect data or how you're analyzing the data you have.

For example, many associations do an annual forced ranking survey that evaluates what their members value- "Rank Our Benefits." However, this type of approach is limited for a couple of reasons:

1. It's association focused and it doesn't tell the story of *why* members value those benefits, the story of how those benefits are valuable to them. This substantially limits the value of any information- you can't just regurgitate the top ranked benefits and convince people to join.
2. What people say and what they do are often very different. I.e. you get their aspirational values in their responses, how they see their ideal values, but not their actual behavior. It's like a parent who says that family is their top value, but they work 60 hour weeks and never see their kids. Members say, "Advocacy," but in reality only pull out their wallets for "Benefits Program."

If you have a difficult time understanding what your members value you're not alone. In the for-profit world, businesses agonize over what customers will pay for. One of the areas where this challenge is most prevalent is for startups that have to build value from the ground up.

Startups are intimately familiar with the challenge of what people say and what they do being different. Because of this, they've developed an assortment of methods to get at the truth. The first methodology and the one that has been foundational for every other approach is, "Customer Development." It was created by Silicon Valley recluse Steve Blank. A key tenant of Customer Development is "get out of the building" which means "go talk to customers."

Every startup founder knows you're supposed to "get out the building," but like you, they wonder, "Ok, I should talk to prospective customers, but what do I ask them?"

The best approach of how to talk to customers is captured in a book titled, "The Mom Test," by Rob Fitzpatrick (there is a link to Rob's wonderful book in the resources section at the end of this e-book.)

It's named "The Mom Test" because it's designed to circumvent misleading answers from people who want to affirm their relationship to you, want you to like them, or want to be seen as nice. It's designed so that even your dear mother, who loves and supports you, couldn't mislead you about what really matters to her.

The Mom Test

1. Talk about their life instead of your idea.
2. Ask about specifics in the past instead of generics or opinions about the future.
3. Talk less and listen more.

This is a highly effective approach to gather data you can rely on.

It works because it:

- Focuses on behavior not hypotheticals.
- Is focused on them, their goals, their situation, their problems and is not anchored to your organization.
- Is designed to gather data, not approval.

The only problem is that it's oriented towards brand new value propositions and not existing value streams like membership.

The Mom Test for You

For people in your target market **who aren't members**, all we need to do is modify the first item and drop "idea."

For existing members, people who have demonstrated your value through their behavior of giving you money, we need a slight modification:

1. Talk about their life.
2. Ask about how membership relates to their life. What piece is it in their puzzle?
3. Ask about specifics in the past instead of generics or opinions about the future.
4. Talk less and listen more.

Some Sample Questions to Get at #2

- How does membership support your goal of x?
- How does membership help with your problem of y?
- What did you do before becoming a member to help with z?

The key is to dig. Look for data in specific examples and instances. Highlight any situations where they paid for a solution to a problem.

And while you're doing it avoid confirmation seeking or validating responses designed to preserve your good opinion of them.

An Example Conversation With a Member

"Thanks for taking some time to chat with me about membership."

"I love being a member, thank-you." (We're cool right?)

"That's great to hear, but can you tell me a little bit about how membership has helped you?" (How exactly are we valuable?)

"Uh...well... there are some great articles in the magazine every month." (I remember reading something and liking it.)

"What articles stood out to you?" (Let's get specific.)

"... There was one a year ago on 3D printing moldings. I took it to my boss and now we're investigating using a 3D printer instead of sourcing moldings from overseas." (+1 for helping members stay up to date with technology.)

"Can you think of other articles like that?" (More evidence?)

"No, but it's always interesting." (Platitudes)

"Has membership helped you stay up to date with other industry changes?"

"Uh, yeah, I think so."

"How?"

"Well, there are a couple of members I talk with that I met at the conference last year."

"They help you keep up to date?"

"Yeah, mostly we talk about other stuff, but we definitely share information about what's changing in the industry."

"What other stuff do you discuss?"

"Well we talk a lot about shop management, dealing with workers, improving layout and processes." (Gold here, this is what matters to these kinds of members.)

"Have you changed anything because of those conversations?"

"A bunch of stuff. It's night and day. Things run so much smoother now. I always felt like every day we were fighting fires on the floor. Now hitting our numbers is easy and they've even bumped them twice. In the weeklies, I sip coffee while the other department heads sweat." (More gold around pain points and what's valuable).

... And keep digging: who, where, what, how...

What does the above conversation tell us?

This kind of manager level member:

- Reads the magazine at least some of the time.
- Is interested in "staying up-to-date" content.
- Cares about shop management, dealing with workers, shop layout, and processes.
- Used to dread "weeklies", having to report to their boss, and spending their days firefighting problems.
- Wants to confidently deliver their numbers while everyone else sweats.

If we saw a trend in conversations with other members like this one, a membership offer to this kind of member might start with:

Headline:

Stop Fighting Fires and Easily Meet Your Weekly Numbers

Subheadline:

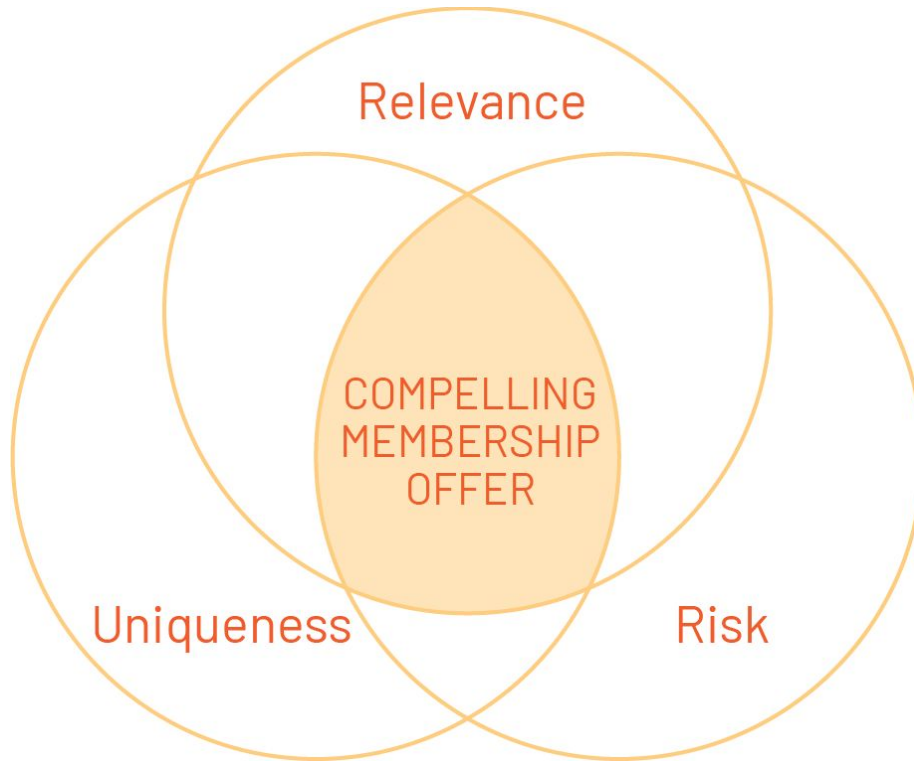
Membership in AUER helps production managers streamline their shops.

Rather than a ranked benefit derived offer of:

"Membership Provides You the AUER Magazine and Other AUER Publications."

(Publications being ranked as #1 in your survey.)

An Easy Offer Template



Once you know what your members actually value it becomes much easier to communicate it. At Resurgent we've developed a simple, but powerful framework to do this. It's called the Member Magnet Framework and is composed of 3 key attributes:

- Relevancy
- Uniqueness
- Risk

We're not going to dive into the framework in this e-book though, rather I'm going to provide you a simple template that meets most of these needs.

Template

Headline:

Speak to one specific kind of member's most desired goal or most painful obstacle.

Subheadline:

Clarify who you're speaking to and what the page is about.

List 3 key benefits that support your value proposition:

List the three main ways that membership serves this kind of member. Why does the benefit matter to them? Use relevant membership features as supporting evidence of each benefit.

Testimonial:

Get a testimonial from someone who actually is this kind of member and has received the benefits you list.

Cost:

List clear pricing.

Call-to-Action:

Ask them to sign up with a button or link. For non-web offers, give them a person to contact, a form to fill out, or a link to an online registration.

How Well Does Your Current Offer Work?

What about your current offer? Want to know how it measures up, what's missing, what's working?

Resurgent has a free tool that you can use to evaluate your offer.

At the end of it, you'll know:

- How compelling your offer is.
- What elements are missing that would make it more persuasive.
- Whether you should focus more on presentation or on what you're offering.

It's easy to understand and only takes around 5 minutes per offer.

Get it here:

https://goresurgent.com/tools/member_magnet_audit.html

Resources

- Steve Blank - <https://steveblank.com>
- Rob Fitzpatrick and "The Mom Test" - <http://momtestbook.com>
- Member Magnet Audit - https://goresurgent.com/tools/member_magnet_audit.html