

Are You Effectively Communicating Your Value?

MAKE IT PERSONAL



Value is determined by the member, the customer, and the one who makes the purchasing or relationship decision. We all know that delivering value is quintessential to keeping our membership strong. Though I have spent my entire career working with businesses and professionals as an employee of chambers of commerce, when it comes to having an organization work to keep me engaged, I look to the experiences and relationships I've cultivated through the American Chamber of Commerce Executives (ACCE). I'm not just a salesman; I'm a customer and a member. By Ben Wolf, IOM



Communicating value is not just about delivering a standard message. It's about identifying what one perceives as valuable. It's not just *what* is said, but *how* it is said that makes the difference. It is tailoring a specific, targeted message to a targeted audience member.

When looking at how ACCE communicates value to me as a member, I see a number of key components that are not only great individual tactics of communicating value, but when combined, create a foundation for the overall quality customer experience.

By streamlining its communication into divisions, ACCE communicates the things that matter most to me. I can honestly say that I now read every email I receive from ACCE because I know it will pertain to topics and issues that I am interested in. The staff has taken the time to build a relationship and get to know me as an individual, not just as another anonymous member. Hand-written thank you notes, personal attention to connecting me with peers and providing advice when needed has helped me excel at my job. ACCE is continually building communication channels for members to connect, including LinkedIn and telephone seminars known as DIALogues. My activity with ACCE has even been tracked over the years to better ensure that I'm getting a personal experience. These are the types of tools that all chamber employees can implement in our own organizations and communities.

IDENTIFY WHAT MEMBERS VALUE

A few years ago at an ACCE convention, I met one of the brightest leaders in our industry. **Richard Wintsch** is **director of sales and retention** at the **Greater Richmond (VA) Chamber of Commerce**. After I hosted a breakout discussion on membership sales, we struck up a conversation about the best ideas we had implemented in order to sell and retain more customers. Richard's idea was that every person who works at a chamber is in the membership business, not just staff in the membership department.

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The concept was to create a “Book of Business,” where each and every staff member was accountable for proactively reaching out to a select group of members on a consistent basis. This outreach provided the platform for various personalized value messages to be delivered over time. More importantly, it provided a way to connect members with staff one-on-one. Staff could ask questions and learn what it was that the members valued.

Just over a year ago the **Nashville Area (TN) Chamber of Commerce** implemented a similar initiative, called “Operation Renewal.” Every staff member's assignment is to maintain contact with as many as fifty members throughout the year. The membership sales team maintains their own accounts for the first two years, but after that, members are connected directly to another designated staff person. We know that member satisfaction can be directly linked to member retention rates. The key is to help the members identify what it is they value in their membership and learn how to give them that value in the most effective way.

Operation Renewal has been in place for over a year now and has provided the platform for us to listen, react and provide innovative ways to deliver value to our members. It has saved relationships with members, uncovered member testimonials and even provided the catalyst for our staff to believe in the value proposition themselves, because now everyone has become intimate with the specifics of what the value is. The point is that by using this approach with our members, we are able to uncover what they find to be of value. Once that is discovered, a personal approach can begin.

PERSONALIZE THE COMMUNICATION EXPERIENCE

Recently I posted a question about segmenting email communication on a number of social networks and message boards in our industry. I was shocked at the number of responses I received with people asking for advice on how and why to segment email communications. This made me realize that most organizations are flooding all their members all the time with all the information, whether it is pertinent to the member or not.

With the overload of communication that we all experience in our own lives, now is the time to look at personalizing the chamber communication experience by segmenting and customizing our communication. No longer will an “all members” email list suffice for each message sent. Whether it is based on demographics, identified interests or past participation, we will lose our members' attention if we don't adapt to their personal interests and needs.

“Buckets” of communication can easily be created and maintained through most membership management databases or broadcast email services. Do your members find value in public policy, small business programs, networking events, or volunteer opportunities? Get specific and tailor what you communicate to whom. As an added bonus, along with giving members

reasons to renew their membership, you'll actually learn more about your members and find new ways to get them engaged in the chamber and the community.

Curt Moss, director of communications at Weblink International and **former director of communications** at the **Las Vegas (NV) Chamber**, recently shared a personalized communication experience with me. He placed an order on SierraTradingPost.com, and his email confirmation contained the following:

You have saved \$22.05 over regular retail prices on this order.
You have saved \$629.11 over regular retail prices on all prior purchases.

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Moss says, “Chambers could do the same or something similar with their discount programs and membership levels. Let them know that they got \$20,000 in exposure and value for a \$10,000 investment.”

In a recent blog post on the topic of tracking personalized information for members, Moss shared the following:

Can you use technology to track, monitor and communicate value that’s specific to each member? For your members to make their own decisions about the value your Chamber provides, you’ll need to provide them details on the referrals they’ve received, discounts used for office supplies or health insurance, events attended, sponsorships completed or any other benefit that can be tracked. Can you demonstrate to each member what your Chamber did specifically for their business? Find a way to track this information in your member management software. Then, use this data to communicate the value to each member. Use email, letters, and phone calls—anything—as long as you speak to specifics.*

BE TRANSPARENT

Moss’s blog post also touches on an emerging communication trend that I strongly support—transparency. The fear of being

transparent about the real value being delivered can be intimidating, but if done right, can be very powerful. By providing members with real information on specific deliverables, members can wrap their arms around exactly what you have done for them. This highly individualized data, combined with your Chamber’s strategic 30,000-foot-view messaging, complement each other beautifully.

As our communities emerge from the current recession, it’s critical for us to examine what the right message is to send to our existing members and our future members. Did your Chamber help position individual businesses to be more prosperous? How? Has your Chamber adapted to provide greater value to members because of the recession? How? Have you created new opportunities for businesses and professionals to connect with each other? How? Now is the time for us all to rethink our strategy around communicating value, so we are able to send the right message to the right member at the right time. Identify what the member values, personalize their communication experience and be transparent about it. ☐

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*To read more blog posts about communicating value, visit <http://blog.weblinkinternational.com>.

