How Long Has It Been?

A few association executives have shared with me that it has been “some time” since their association has implemented a formal member research study; and they are somewhat apprehensive about what they may learn from such a study. I appreciated their candor and reassured them that surveying the total membership isn’t just to uncover shortcomings. In fact, there is a flip side to the survey results to “coin” an expression (pun intended). A Member Loyalty/Engagement Study can also highlight the strengths of an association, confirm that the association is effectively delivering the products and services members value; and is a great source for capturing testimonials and content ideas for future communications and programs.

While Member Loyalty/Engagement Studies are the flagship offering in our suite of marketing research products, several association clients and prospective clients look to us for additional services:

- Member Needs Assessments
- Lapsed & Prospective Member Studies
- Industry/Environmental Scans
- Competitive Benchmarking
- Segmentation Studies

Often times, Needs Assessments are folded into a member loyalty/engagement study to gauge the “fit” and delivery of current products and services. They are also appropriate as “stand alone” studies for prospective members and stakeholders such as advertisers and exhibitors. For associations considering expanding into a new marketplace or adding a new class of provider to its industry such as the dental therapist of today or nurse practitioner and physician assistant of the past, a needs assessment can be piggy-backed to an Industry/Environmental Scan. Who will serve this new workforce? What are their needs? Now? In the future?

Associations whose retention numbers are trending downward might consider a Lapsed Member Study to understand why membership numbers have dropped and what actions can be taken to re-engage former members.

Like Needs Assessments, Competitive Benchmarking can also be tied into a member loyalty/engagement study or conducted as a stand alone study to identify what the association should be offering to differentiate themselves from other associations or organizations.

If an association serves multiple segments, Needs Assessments can be done across the various segments. Tracie Mrakich, our Director of Strategy & Business Development, shares her thoughts on Segmentation in this issue.

Segmentation: Who is Hiding in Your Member Database?

Every association has a variety of member segments; and each segment may have different needs. More than likely, these segments are identified in your membership database: member type, primary reason for joining, tenure in profession, gender, geography or if applicable local chapter affiliation. This information gives every association a starting point for strategic planning, program and benefits development.

There is a second group of member segments that are less obvious or cannot be identified easily. These segments can be found with member research and can fall into two (2) categories:

- Needs-based
- Experience/Usage-based

Once identified, association leadership can determine the size of the segment (both within the current membership base and pool of prospective and lapsed members.) Leadership will then need to assess if the association has the resources in place to meet the needs of the newly discovered segment.

When evaluating the segment and your association as a whole, it is important to look outside of your organization with an Industry/Environmental Scan to capture the bigger picture:

- What is happening in the industry? How will industry changes impact this new segment as well as the association overall?
- Is the industry growing or contracting? How will that impact the size and viability of the segment?
- Can this new segment drive membership growth? Or, are there other organizations already serving the needs of this segment?

If the newly discovered segment has legs (numbers that are too large to ignore with good growth potential), be sure to add this segment into your member database - perhaps as a special interest group (SIG) and include it on your membership and renewal applications for future identification and targeted communications. This will allow you to further assess interest level and growth potential for this segment. It will also enable you to engage these members in program development.

Tracie Mrakich is a member of ASAE, ISAE, Association Forum of Chicagoland and the American Marketing Association (AMA). She is a past-president of the Indianapolis Chapter of the AMA (INDY AMA) and currently serves on the membership committee of the Indiana Society of Association Executives (ISAE). Contact Tracie at 317.466.5003 or tmrakich@loyaltyresearch.com to discuss your member research needs.
“Conference Season” is Around the Corner...

As associations enter into conference season, the focus will be on how to create a valuable, engaging experience for their members.

There is one segment of members, Industry Partners, who play a critical role in a conference’s success. Associations recognize just how important exhibitors are to their conferences and offer an Industry Partner membership that includes a discounted price for booth space at conferences. Even with the discounted rate, it is still the conference experience and its perceived value/return on investment that will determine whether or not a company chooses to exhibit at future conferences. Conference experience could even impact an industry partner’s decision to continue their membership.

In our latest thought perspective, Driving Non-Dues Revenue Through Your Industry Partners, we touch on a number of key considerations for understanding and meeting the needs of this segment. Building strong relationships with your industry partners will not only insure future conference participation but will allow you to capture additional non-dues revenue outside of “conference season.” Access this thought perspective at: http://bit.ly/XoTZZO

In addition to Matt’s involvement with ASAE and ISAE, he is on the board of the Butler University Young Alumni Association. Go Dawgs!

Matt can be reached at 317.466.5035 or mbraun@loyaltyresearch.com.