

ASSOCIATIONS

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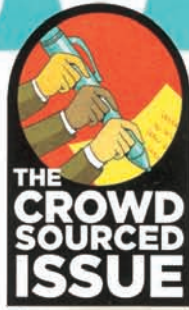
IDEAS INTO ACTION

5|09

Creating financial efficiency 27

Most memorable meetings 33

CEOs talk about the economy 38



People First

If you think social media's all about technology, think again. It's all about finding those members who will help you connect.



Every association needs a social media strategy, says David Nour. But think about people before you think about Tweeting.

Interview by
Mark Athitakis

Social media is all about new technologies, but making the most of those tools demands a lot of old-fashioned wisdom about how and why people connect. In his book *Relationship Economics*, Atlanta-based social networking strategist David Nour outlines how the heart of your success (both personally and organizationally) comes from identifying the people who are the most likely to help you connect to others and explains how exchanging useful information on social media can make for stronger ties between you and the people you need.

Nour, who will present a Thought Leader Session at ASAE & The Center's 2009 Annual Meeting & Expo, knows that social media is a demanding time investment. As he writes in the book: "Time and intellect are your two most valuable assets—you can't afford to waste either." But the unique opportunities for connections provided by social media make the investment worth the effort—though perhaps, like Nour, you might want to keep a timer handy as you get to work.

Associations Now: How well are associations using social media?

David Nour: They know of it. But their knowledge, and more importantly, their strategic view of it, is really limited. My premise specifically with association executives is that our world is really changing, and there are three key attributes [to that change]. One is the next generation that's coming into the associations. Now associations have to cater to the new executive very differently than they have in previous generations. These are executives that are very technologically savvy. Two, the way we gather, disseminate, and share information is changing. In the years past you could snail-mail something to me. Now I get more insights about a topic from the web, from my friends, from Twitter, much more quickly—certainly in a much more timely fashion than even three to five years ago. Third is really the perceived value of what I'm getting for my association membership, and I would submit that that perceived value is changing and evolving. Unless you evolve with it, I'm going to ask, "Why am I spending \$200 or \$1,000 or \$1,500 a year with you for my membership, and what am I getting for it?"



This article was inspired by an idea submitted by Elizabeth Weaver Engel, CAE.

The Right Connection

As an association you have an incredible opportunity to really take a leadership role in your association's presence on a multitude of social networking platforms.



Potential members are often already self-organizing on social media. What can an association do to engage with a group that's already created itself?

I had a conversation with an executive director a couple of weeks ago who was contemplating whether a LinkedIn group made sense for them or not. That is really frustrating for an outsider looking in. A bunch of people on the board who've got cobwebs hanging off their suits are probably not the best people to determine if social-network inspection makes sense. Their members are already on there, and if you don't take the leadership in this, you're going to get out-hustled, out-picked, and out-positioned.

As an association you have an incredible opportunity to really take a leadership role in your association's presence on a multitude of social networking platforms. If you don't do it, somebody else is going to. When members are informally creating groups that really should be your charter, that should be your responsibility. So what should you do? Immediately take a leadership position. Reach out to whoever created [the group] on LinkedIn. Whoever puts up a group, there's a group leader. Reach out to that group leader, and bring the leadership and forces of the association to then lead that group.

There's something called the 1-9-90 phenomenon. At any social gathering, one percent is going to be the life of the party. They've got all kinds of great stories. They're mesmerizing. They're

engaging. Nine percent are moderately engaged. They'll share their stories, they're very attentive, they're tuned in. The other 90 percent are passively engaged. It doesn't mean they don't care, but they'll probably jump in and say, "Oh, yeah, we did that too," or, "Oh, yeah, here's an exciting scenario that I can share." So they're intrigued, but they're passively engaged.

The exact same phenomenon is true with any kind of a social networking environment. You will never get 100 percent participation. To be successful in any kind of social networking environment, number one, identify the one percent. If you focus on enhancing the interaction between the one and the nine percent, you'll engage the other 90 percent. And that's what will lead to a successful online community. You have to really encourage the one percent. Feed them as much love and attention and awareness as you can. Interview them for your magazine. Have them do a breakout session at your next annual education event. Make sure they continue to be that center of attention.

You've worked with something on the order of 400 different tools, which is overwhelming for anybody just wading in. How do you identify which ones are worth your time and your energy?

I get calls on a regular basis where people say, "We should be on Twitter." OK, why? Unless you start asking the why questions, you'll never be as effective as you could be with the how questions. You have to start with a strategy. What's your social networking

strategy? Why do you believe you need to be active or proactive on a multitude of social networking platforms? What are you trying to do?

For some associations it's to attract new members. That strategy then drives the right tools, but you also need good people. Who is the one percent who's going to be very actively engaged? It probably is that 20-year-old. It probably is that 30-year-old that's new to the organization, who hasn't been jaded. Really get them focused, make that mess their possibility. The nine percent could be people who have been around the business a while, people who know the fundamentals of the association, the fundamentals of the industry. The 90 percent is perhaps your audience.

Which tool you should use really depends on what you're trying to do. If you're trying to identify prospective members, Jigsaw could be a really good fit for you. By far, the most prevalent social networking platform for business professions is LinkedIn. You'd be really smart to have a Facebook business page. You should absolutely Twitter. Focusing on three to five tools and really leveraging them well is much more effective than trying to dabble in 100.

Most Twitter users seem to take a long time to grasp its value, especially because it doesn't have the centralized group-leader dynamic of LinkedIn and Facebook. How do you use Twitter to find that one percent that's useful to you?

The first two weeks I was on Twitter I was thinking, "What a frickin' waste

of time." Some people will write, "I'm having pizza." When did that become interesting to anybody else? But what I quickly learned is after a couple weeks I start to really see some really insightful ideas and perspectives. The really cool part about Twitter is people have taken a very simple idea—you've got 140 characters, so you've got to get to the point. And people are saying more than just what they're doing—they're saying what they're reading, and what they're thinking, and what they're watching. I landed in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, two days ago, and I said [on Twitter], "Just landed at Jackson Hole; what an incredibly picturesque place." Within three to five minutes I have 10 to 15 responses back from people who are following me. "You should go here." "Check out this place." "Did you know you're at the base of Yellowstone? You could go here." They share insights.

That's because you've interacted with these people yourself and provided recommendations to them in the past. So you've become an information broker.

Bingo. Your relationship building online has to be congruent with who you are, and what you do, and how you build relationships offline while making them online. When I'm on Twitter I'm constantly adding insights, saying, "Hey, McKinsey just came out with this," or "I just attended this event, and here's the link to it," or "Here's a really cool white paper I found." When something like 70 percent of my posts include links, it shows you that I'm adding value.

A lot of people say that sort of investment takes time away from in-person networking.

Nothing will ever replace us shaking hands, looking each other eye to eye, going to events. When you do that it helps you balance when you're online. Believe it or not, I have a timer on my desk, and I make sure that I set the time for an hour with social networks, because there really is a point of diminishing return. Facebook is incredibly addicting; you could be on Facebook for

four hours and then have nothing to show for it. So when I limit that exploration to an hour a day it still allows me to get the work done and get out of my office at a decent hour.

Are there any triggers that let you know when you're making the wrong relationships or you're using these social networks in a wrong way?

I have what I call a three-touch rule. I'll make three steps in that relationship without expecting anything in return, but there are a couple things that I'm looking for. Number one is gratitude. When you invest in someone, when you add value, the first thing I want to hear is, "Thank you." Number two is reciprocity. You don't have the bandwidth online or offline to invest in everybody equally. I cannot continue to invest in those who don't get it.

Please don't misconstrue what I'm saying. I'm not telling people how to be more manipulative. I'm not talking about how to keep score. I'm simply saying, "What are you doing to be more strategic, more intentional, and more quantifiable in the relationships you choose to invest in?"

So how do you know when you're wasting your time? Six Sigma taught me that you cannot possibly improve something you don't measure. How are you measuring your return on your relationship investments online or offline? How much of your membership is coming from referrals from your existing members?

You mentioned the need to find good people for social media efforts. How do you identify the people within your association who should play that role?

They really go through a self-identification process. Anytime somebody's new to an organization there's this sense of intrigue. Whatever the situation is, they want to know more. They want to get to know people. They want to volunteer. So you want to use them. You certainly don't want to abuse them, but look for people who are stepping up. Look for people who are volunteering. Sometimes a layoff may be a blessing

in disguise because those people were so busy and so heads-down focused on the minutiae of the day that they didn't have the chance to volunteer for a committee or get on the board or lead a key initiative in the association. Now they have a little more time on their hands, and they genuinely want to give their time and their talents. What are you doing to proactively seek those people out? What are you doing to really identify and leverage the respective strengths of your volunteer base?

People fundamentally gather for two core reasons. One is content: What can I learn? How can I grow personally and professionally? Two is community: Who else will be there? Who else can I get to know? Who else can I engage? So a lot of the times the one percent identify themselves. They volunteer for things. They want to do things. Don't just wait for them to step up. Actively pull them out. "We are putting together a core team to do monthly webinars for our constituents. Would you be interested in either putting it on or identifying talent or interviewing talent?" Have a process to engage them and really put their core strength to work. And publicly recognize their contribution. **an**

David Nour is a social-networking strategist and author of Relationship Economics: Transform Your Most Valuable Business Contacts Into Personal and Professional Success. He will speak in a Thought Leader session at ASAE & The Center's 2009 Annual Meeting & Expo, August 15 to 18, in Toronto, Ontario. Email: dnour@nourgroupp.com

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