Show Me the Value

Unless membership is a regulatory requirement in a particular industry, many voluntary institutes, associations and chambers are battling to stay afloat, with companies and individuals seriously challenging the value they receive from their memberships.

Traditional membership benefits
Take the brochures from a handful, remove the logos, and what you have is a surprisingly similar set of benefits – access to education and training programmes, networking events, annual awards, a newsletter or magazine, a website, international reciprocity, legal and regulatory advice, business start-up advice, and possibly some electronic process facilitating communication with fellow members.

The impact of technology on membership services
The only problem is one can access much of the information that was, two or three decades ago, privileged information, heard only at an exclusive business breakfast, or learned through just a few learning programmes, or breaking news in the member’s newsletter or magazine.
Today if you want a template for a marketing plan, just type in ‘marketing plan template’ on a search engine - your biggest problem then is which one to choose! If you want to know what a particular marketer, whom you have as a role model, thinks about, say, advertising to children, or the application of marketing in a small business, you just ask them through one of the social networks, and hundreds of others can then join the debate.

But what do the benefits really mean to an individual, organisation, or community?
It’s most interesting and encouraging, consulting and acting as an outsourced practitioner in this particular environment, that most of the voluntary organisations in the broader marketing and communications field are really having a good hard look at their relevance to existing and potential members.
Association Boards and CEOs are saying “no more of the same old, same old!”

There’s some really deep thinking going on, with lots of interaction with individuals from smaller businesses, and listening to the voice of communities. One hopes they will follow through!

What’s in it for me, my organisation, or my community?

New processes, such as Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), now starting to become accessible electronically, are enabling marketers to quickly assess their own strengths and weaknesses, identify gaps, and then find the specific learning intervention to fill that knowledge gap. Organisations which can offer appropriate coaching and mentoring services will surely be recognised by industry leaders as worthwhile to subscribe to. Providing a service to a community, to help them uplift themselves, is a very different membership benefit, for which there is a huge need. How is your internship programme running, and do your industry members help you fund a service like that?

Do you really listen, and do you understand my needs?

Whilst business English is a desirable communication medium, which marketing institute, association and chamber will start communicating with potential members in their vernacular, with case studies that mean something in the context of their daily lives? Working in the ‘introductory to middle’ levels is another ball-game! People need lots of help to get there, and then want to receive recognition that they’ve achieved a certain level.

How can I be recognised for my hard-earned competence?

For many emerging Marketers, professional recognition is highly desirable. It will be interesting to measure the uptake by marketers, and the degree of funding by their organisations, of the re-introduction of the Marketing Practitioner SA designation, in a manner that works for busy marketers and business people responsible for the marketing function. This will involve a POE management programme through which the criteria for the MPSA professional designation will be clearly identified, suggestions made on suitable evidence to be presented, with a panel of coaches and mentors on standby to interact with each individual to help them achieve this.

Designations of this nature will be bestowed by institutes and associations that have registered with the regulators as Professional bodies.

How do I maintain my professional development?

Keeping up-to-date, and staying on the marketing bus as it moves rapidly through new business environments, is essential for both developing and practicing marketers. Institutes, associations and chambers that channel their members through meaningful and value-adding Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programmes are likely to be most successful.

People need people!

As the Barbara Streisand song goes: “People, who need people, are the luckiest people in the world”. Whilst that defines the era of my association with such bodies, I’m now predicting that Institutes, Associations and Chambers that are able to successfully transform themselves into ‘indispensable resources’ to individuals, their organisations, and their communities, rather than just ‘nice to haves’, will grow quickly and be successful.

Whilst the marketing organisation field is currently fragmented, there is some benefit to potential members in that they now have a choice of professional association – a healthy situation. Yes, it does mean some duplication, but it’s pleasing to see a mature attitude emerging. How each can collectively contribute to higher standards of marketing practice seems to be the general attitude, with sensible collaboration on aspects such as professional designations and CPD processes.

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