
4 Global Trends in Associations You Need to Know About.

Belinda Moore, Strategic Membership Solutions

Many of my clients tell me they're worried about the future of their association. They're worried about declining membership rates; lack of engagement; the increase in competitors (Google we're looking at you!) and more.

If you're worried about the future of your association, and don't know what move to make next, you need to know what's coming down the pipeline. After all, forewarned is forearmed. Here's just a few trends making headlines.

1. Robots will revolutionise the workplace

40% of jobs today will not exist in 30 years. Why? Because the advent of artificial intelligence, business bots, autonomous robots and other technology advances are replacing existing jobs at an ever-increasing pace.

For example, the transport industry will experience mass job loss as autonomous vehicles become more common. Mining companies are already using driverless trucks to do dirty, dangerous work; they can afford to do so because the remoteness of the location (and lack of humans to run over) enables them to test the driverless trucks without extensive regulatory oversight.

This disruption is not limited to traditional blue-collar jobs. Artificial intelligence (AI) is being developed to replace lawyers. Leading global law firm Herbert Smith Freehills has created a global Alternative Legal Services (ALT) business. This facility is the first of its kind to be opened and operated by a law firm in Australia. It combines legal expertise and technology solutions to process high-volume work more efficiently. Last year, the team used AI to process a staggering 63 million documents, review over 3 million documents and 5,000 property leases.

Aged care providers will seek out robots to do the physical heavy-lifting once done by carers and nurses. They'll also use robots to dispense medications and ensure compliance. Staff will still be needed of course but mainly to offer the 'human touch' and the 'caring element' that robots can't provide (yet).

Kevin Bloch, Chief Technologist Officer at CiSCO (Australia/NZ) made it very clear how service providers

can provide a point of difference and avoid being replaced by robots. "The safest jobs are those where qualitative decision making and relationship-building skills are required."

How does this affect your association? ... If your association relies on humans to do what a robot can do, you're at risk of having your membership based eroded because those humans won't be needed in that role for much longer.

2. Bricks and mortar stores will survive - but only some!

Brick and mortar stores that simply offer product without context or expertise will find it difficult to compete in the new environment. And those that don't have a fully formed online presence are guaranteed to fail. Those most likely to succeed will have a 'phygital' presence - where the physical meets the digital - that enables them to provide fast, easy and personalised experiences.

How does this affect your association? ... If you're in the retail sector and your members rely on people visiting their storefront, they will have to up their game and find new ways to bring people into their store. They'll need to consider creating experiences that simply can't be had just by buying online. Westfield shopping centres have turned into entertainment palaces and regularly feature fashion parades, gigantic playgrounds and rock concerts to keep the masses entertained. If your members can't compete with the likes of Westfield centres, they need to find a way to compete.

3. The Gig Economy will casualise the workforce and change way membership works

"Why pay people when they're not actually working?" is what Monique Eddy says, an in-demand virtual assistant. "My clients pay me an hourly rate for specific tasks. They love it because they only pay for what they get and they get high-quality work without any of the staffing or contractual issues." If you've ever watched a staff member file their nails whilst checking out Justin Bieber's Facebook page, you'll know why so many people are outsourcing their work to people like Monique.

Monique is part of the gig economy. The increased casualisation of the workforce means freelancers can select from a range of temporary projects or jobs. It also means employers can select the best individuals from a large pool of workers for specific tasks.

How does this affect your association? ... The gig economy will have a dramatic effect on the membership levels of your association. For example, if an organisation in your association currently has 1000 full time staff, in time that could morph down into an organisation with just 100 full-time staff and an 'on-call' workforce of 5000 (many of whom will be part of the gig economy and possibly working for other organisations). Many of those on-call workers may not have the need to join your association anymore. The impact of that? Your association will need new membership models to deal with the growth of those who belong to the gig economy.

(Additionally, if your staff is made up of Gen Y and Millennials, chances are they're already part of the gig economy and doing much of that work on the side, during the day, on your dime! Sad but true.)

4. Drone usage will expand dramatically

Get used to seeing the skies filled with connected drones that can scan vast distances and collect data whilst doing so. Our defence forces have used them in combat zones for years and domestically Australia Post and Amazon have been testing extensively to see how drones can be used to deliver parcels.

How does this affect your association? ... If you're in the farming, agricultural, telecom, aid or medical sector, to name just a few, you can expect to see the usage of drones 'skyrocket'. Consider the ability of drones to deliver snake anti-venom directly to a bushwalker. Or scan an earthquake zone for survivors. Or to launch a wireless network in a cyclone ravaged suburb. Or to scan an orchard to see if the fruit is ready for picking. Drones will be a game changer for many industries and by default, many associations.

Key take-aways

1. Be prepared. Change is coming. There is no going back and accepting that change is the new normal is the key to moving forward.
2. Keep abreast of the trends in your industry. It's easy to do. Just Google - "Trends in... (insert your industry name here) industry – and take a look at the Thought Leaders commenting on it and follow them on Twitter. It's a quick way to keep up with what's happening.
3. Get involved. There's some fun ways you can keep ahead of the curve. Visit [CiSCOs' Innovation Centre](#); or attend a [Meet-Up](#) with drone enthusiasts and get up close and personal with those who are creating the future.
4. Get competent at using technology. If technology intimidates you, upskill so that it doesn't. Libraries and councils offer great, cost-effective short courses on a range of tech topics. Even better, ask your 10-year-old to show you how they use the iPad (and you'll quickly discover why Gen Z are poised to take over the world!). What they know about technology will astound you.
5. Connect with experts. Invite the thought leaders in your industry to blog for your association. Find out who's who by attending conferences like [C2 Conference](#), one of the world's most innovative business conferences.

More information

You can find more information on this topic on the [Strategic Membership Solutions](#) website. Alternatively, email info@smsonline.net.au for a list of free resources relating to sponsorship, membership, and revenue generation for associations.