

MEMBERSHIP

The power of a phone call

How to ensure your members see value in your association.

When subscription time rolls around, members need to instantly feel that the fee is worth paying. They need to see value in the relationship, feel positive about their membership and feel connected to their association.

If they don't, they'll either switch to a competing organisation, or they'll let the membership lapse altogether.

Many associations rely on non-verbal forms of communication with their members. Social media, SMS or emails are often considered the most cost-effective ways to engage with members, but do these really build engagement?

There is another way. Outbound phone contact can be an incredibly effective strategy for associations to connect positively with their members. A well-timed and correctly messaged phone call campaign can achieve a wide range of goals for associations, institutes, not-for-profits and unions, including:

- Stemming membership lapses,
- Building a more positive relationship between member and their association,
- Ensuring member contact details are up-to-date,
- Gaining valuable insights and feedback about what members want from their association, and
- Boosting attendance at conferences or events.

A firm that we use and refer on a regular basis is Optimum Contact based in Brisbane. Founder and Director, Colin Perry, shares three insights into how phone-based membership engagement can deliver successful solutions for associations.

Help your members feel the love

According to Colin, one of the most frequent grumbles they hear from members is that their association only makes contact when their subscription falls due. This can leave them feeling undervalued, and more likely to let their membership lapse.

"Members need to feel that their association is genuinely interested in them. They need to know that they matter, and that they're not just an invoice," he said.

"One subscription renewal letter a year just won't cut it. Associations need to be more proactive and personal in connecting with their members.

"This could be as simple as calling members a couple of times a year to check their details are current, letting them know that an early bird rate for a conference is ending soon, or reminding them about the member benefits they're entitled to." Colin said that proactive, personal contact with members throughout the year can make all the difference in boosting their engagement.

"When members hear from their association about things other than subscription fees, they feel more valued."

Member feedback can be gold

The old adage, 'you don't know what you don't know' is particularly apt for associations. Colin reported that it's quite common for associations to be facing a declining membership base without really knowing why.

"A lot of associations aren't delving deeply enough to find out why members don't renew their membership, and this makes it impossible to reverse the trend. It's imperative that associations hear both the good and the bad feedback from their members so that they can act on it."

Optimum Contact helped one national professional association with this exact problem.

"Our client was seeing a worrying decline in member renewals, but their internal team didn't really have the skills, or the right training, to find out why they were lapsing. Without a clear picture of what their members were dissatisfied with, they simply didn't know how to fix the problem.

"We implemented a contact strategy to lapsed members and through our carefully worded questioning, we were able to find out valuable insights into what members were feeling about the association. We also found out what would entice them to rejoin," said Colin.

"We fed the intelligence we gathered back to the association and they have used this tangible feedback to inform their offering, incentives and program of events. I'm pleased to say they have reversed their membership decline, and now have a much richer understanding of what their members value about their membership".

Lapsed members can be converted

Colin says that Optimum Contact helps many clients reactivate members who have lapsed. He uses one example to explain why it's important not to give up on members who haven't renewed.

“We’ve partnered with a national professional institute that provides education and networking opportunities for senior executives. This institute was seeing an increase in lapses, but their internal team was stretched and was finding it hard to make contact with the lapsed members.

“These members weren’t lost to the institute. They hadn’t let their membership lapse on purpose – they were just very time poor and had simply forgotten to pay the invoice. In essence, they’d slipped through the cracks. We stepped in and turned things around by cleaning up the database, talking to the lapsed members about the benefits of belonging, and securing a renewal over the phone,” he said.

“The reactivation of lapsed members delivered a return on investment of over 620% which was a fantastic result for our client.”

Look for wide-ranging capabilities

Colin states that it’s important for associations to be able to utilise a range of services from the one member engagement provider.

“Clients engage Optimum at many different levels, from outbound call services right through to strategic planning. We do data cleansing to ensure that contact

details are validated, and we have a great track record in event promotion. We even function as an in-bound phone answering service for some of our clients.

“We love it when clients engage us at their strategic planning process. This means we can identify potential issues in advance and proactively plan the best timing for various campaigns,” he said.

What will it cost?

Outbound call campaigns are surprisingly cost effective for associations, especially when compared with the cost of doing nothing. When you consider that sending a hard-copy renewal pack or industry magazine can cost upwards of \$10 each, if the member address is wrong, that can quickly add up to a whole lot of wasted money.

Similarly, the cost of attracting a new member can be substantially more than reconnecting with, and renewing, an existing or lapsed member.

For Colin, the power of the phone call is undeniable. “We’ve achieved some exceptional ROIs for our clients. But more importantly, we’ve helped them reestablish their relevancy to their members, and this delivers ongoing benefits to the association.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

ASSESS YOUR ENGAGEMENT

Is your current member communication effective?
Is it giving you a true understanding of your members’ needs and wants?

HOW CLEAN IS YOUR DATABASE?

You’ll never renew a member if you can’t contact them. A member engagement service can help ensure any communication actually reaches the member.

BE PERSONAL

Regular, personal contact with members is an important factor in driving membership renewals and long-term loyalty.

CHOOSE LOCAL

Make sure you choose a firm that employs local people with excellent communication skills. The message in the conversation is just as important as making the call.

Optimum Contact

READY TO MAKE YOUR MEMBERS
FEEL TRULY VALUED?

Membership renewals ● Past member reactivations ● Generating
event delegates ● Member engagement ● Database updates



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