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Commentary

Getting applause from your audience(s)

The Communication Connection

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When it comes to communication, do you know who the audiences are for your assn?

Members are the obvious and most important audience, but there are many others. They typically include a wide spectrum of individuals and organizations such as:

- Legislators (federal and state)
- Regulatory agencies
- Related industry assns
- Member customers
- Industry suppliers
- Nonmembers
- The public

Every assn should think carefully about which audiences are important and how the assn is reaching them through communication vehicles, such as e-newsletters, print publications, public relations activities and marketing campaigns.

Diagramming these audiences and the communication vehicles that reach them is a useful exercise to analyze whether your organization is reaching the right targets. It's also the first step in determining if these audiences are applauding or scratching their heads when they hear from you.

Try this exercise at your next senior staff meeting:

Discuss and identify your key audiences and prioritize them. List each of your key audiences on a separate flipchart page with a number corresponding to its priority ranking and tape the pages to the wall of your conference room.

For each audience, list the major communication vehicles that reach the group. Higher priority audiences will have longer lists of vehicles. Look for gaps that might indicate areas for potential improvement.

Next, examine what actions you expect each audience to take in relation to your assn. Should they join, participate, buy something, act on legislation affecting your industry or profession, or simply have a better understanding of what your assn does?

Assess the level of resources directed at each audience. Do the resources of time, money, and effort match the importance of each audience? Don't get bogged down in a full budgeting exercise; just use this opportunity to get an

overall sense on how resources are allocated.

This exercise will help sr. executives better understand the full spectrum of audiences the assn seeks to influence, how they interrelate, and how communications are reaching them. This improved understanding will be important in future strategic planning and in evaluating the communication program.

After evaluating audiences, **the next step is creating core messages for each audience** to use in assn communications.

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