



ASSOCIATION GLOBAL SERVICES

Thinking **Globally**, Acting **Locally**



Social Networking & Associations

Survey Results

August 2008

Survey Conducted by Association Global Services, Inc.

Social Networking & Associations Survey Results

Social and professional networks are having a dramatic impact on trade and professional associations. At the same time, many for-profit companies are trying to emulate associations' traditional ability to build communities and are creating "social networks" for customers and staff.

In July 2008, Association Global Services conducted a survey of associations to determine how they are approaching this fast evolving trend. The survey was completed by 179 association executives who were informed and invited to participate by email, LinkedIn, Facebook and word of mouth. Within 48 hours of distributing the survey over 150 associations had responded. The following report highlights the results.

1. Social technologies are the most important trend that my organizations is following at this time:

Answer	Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Strongly Agree	20	11.1%
Agree	68	37.9%
No Opinion	18	10.0%
Disagree	62	34.6%
Strongly Disagree	10	5.5%
Total	178	

Association executives appear to be split down the middle with roughly 50% agreeing or strongly agreeing that social technologies are the most important trend to follow and the other 50% either having no opinion, disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the statement. An analysis of the detailed responses indicate however that a significant number of Respondents who did not agree with the statement did so because it is not the MOST important trend, but that it is still an important trend for their associations.

2. My organization views these new technologies and social networking as a great opportunity.

Answer	Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Strongly Agree	64	35.7%
Agree	80	44.6%
No Opinion	20	11.1%
Disagree	10	5.5%
Strongly Disagree	4	2.2%
Total	178	

Over 80% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that new technologies and social networking represent a great opportunity for their organization; however, most believed that there were significant related risks and challenges in social networking including: a.) being able to use the tools correctly, b.) getting approval from Board members and CEOs to advance social networking use, and c.) making the membership aware of the tools and getting the membership to make use of them.

3. My organization has a plan on how to approach, develop and use social technologies.

Answer	Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Strongly Agree	22	12.2%
Agree	53	29.6%
No Opinion	22	12.2%
Disagree	73	40.7%
Strongly Disagree	8	4.4%
Total	178	

Of the over 40% of respondents stating that they had a plan on how to approach, develop and use social technologies, most of these plans are either not fully developed, have not been started or are "loose" with the primary objective being to get the organization's feet wet in social networking. Very few in fact have a "strong" strategic plan on how they intend to use or create a social networking platform for their membership.

4. My organization is communication with, sharing or otherwise collaborating with other organizations on this issue.

Answer	Number of Responses	Response Ratio
No	130	72.6%
Yes	49	27.4%
Total	179	

Over 70% of respondents said they were not sharing or collaborating with other organizations on this issue. Those who said they were collaborating with other groups mentioned external consulting firms, ASAE or similar associations in their industry sector.

5. My organization is well aware of the features and differences between the following social technology platforms.

Answer	Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Facebook	124	19.1%
LinkedIn	113	17.4%
MySpace	98	15.1%
SharePoint	75	11.5%
Yahoo Groups	66	10.1%
Plaxo	43	6.6%
Higher Logic	26	4%
Internal Platform	25	3.8%
Other (Namyz, Zing, InterNations)	43	6.6%
Total	613	

Respondents indicated they were most familiar with Facebook, LinkedIn and MySpace as available social networking technologies. Although most were familiar with multiple platforms, many did not have a full understanding of how the sites actually function and were still unclear about how they could utilize the sites' features to enhance their organization.

6. My organization would expect ASAE to provide direction and information about social technologies and the impact on associations.

Answer	Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Yes	155	86.5%
No	21	11.7%
Total	176	

Over 85% of respondents expect ASAE to provide direction and to inform them on social technologies and the potential impact on associations. As the association for association executives, respondents expect ASAE to serve its membership with training and explanations of the different technologies.

7. My organization is turning to other resources for information on how social technologies might impact our organization and how to develop and approach a business plan.

Sources	Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Internet Resources (Blogs, Wikis, Articles, Searches)	26	26.8%
Outside Consultants/Agencies	24	24.7%
Other Association Resources (ASAE, NTEN, IEEE)	16	16.5%
Internal Solution	15	15.5%
Books & Industry Magazines	8	8.2%
None	8	8.2%
Total	97	

Approximately 40% of the respondents confirmed that they were using outside resources, and of that group, the resources cited varied widely. These includes ASAE, CESSE, CSAE, consultants and vendors, magazines, blogs, Wiki's, books and magazines, etc. None of the specific resources seemed to dominate the list with the exception of ASAE, which was mentioned most frequently but not universally. It appears when it comes to outside resources, most associations are scanning widely to gather information.

8. How would you describe your one most important issue/problem /opportunity/priority related to the topic of social technologies as applies to your organization?

Answer	Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Appeal to members	47	37.3%
Strategy	13	10.3%
How to build/use	10	8.0%
Staff Resources	10	7.9%
ROI	9	7.1%
Selecting a Platform	8	6.3%
Communication with members	6	4.8%
Integration with current system	6	4.8%
Approval from higher ups	4	3.2%
Legal issues	6	4.8%
Competition	3	2.4%
Prioritizing in the association	2	1.6%
Timing	2	1.6%
Total	126	

Over 37% of respondents stated that continuing to appeal to their current membership while implementing social networks (to appeal to a new group of potential members) was their greatest risk in adopting social networking technologies. A further 50% of those respondents claimed specifically that they feared losing members from an older demographic for seeming too “young” or “hip” (by embracing “social networks”) or if executed incorrectly, that younger members would find a better solution outside of the association’s created product/solution. Further, 10.3% of association executives reported that they did not have a specific strategy on how to implement or adapt the new technology to make it work with their current systems or services.

In reading the detailed responses of the 179 survey respondents, it is clear that the topic of social technologies and networks is very important to the association community. It is also clear that there appear to be great differences of opinion within associations - among different staff levels and between staffs and volunteer leadership - over just how important this trend is going to be to their organizations.

Because of the relatively immature stage of this technological and social trend, there are many fast moving parts.

Associations appear to be in the information gathering and parsing stage and do not have really clear-cut strategies or seem to know exactly what they want social technologies to do for their organization. A significant number of associations have firm plans and intend to create social networking platforms within their existing membership base for use by the members. It is too early to tell if such efforts will meet the objective of creating such a communication platform.

One thing is certain: social technologies will have an impact on traditional association services, members, governance structures and staff. However, in a marketplace that is constantly evolving and where there are few mature case studies to compare against, it is too early to tell just how this transformation will take place . We feel the value of this survey is the confirmation that most associations are in the same stage of gathering information so that they can better understand the trend and what social networks mean before they can start firm implementation plans that support their associations’ mission, vision and organizational strategy.

The choices are limitless for social networking platforms. Whether large associations develop an in-house solution using their IT department or small associations use established platforms like Facebook and LinkedIn, everyone needs a strategy to retain and attract members who use such tools that will enhance the member experience.



Association Global Services (AGS) is the recognized global leader in international association strategy and professional management services. Founded in 2000 in Brussels, Belgium, AGS has provided guidance and service to non-profits around the world. The AGS Approach provides current and potential clients with a proven framework to address challenges and ultimately grow and add success to the organization.

AGS provides a wide range of services from international strategic planning to full service management in our global offices located in **Brussels, Washington, DC, London, Basel, Singapore, Shanghai, Sydney, Sao Paulo, Panama, Cape Town and New Delhi.**

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