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# Three Data-Informed Strategies for Better Member Engagement

Julie Scullo

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## Three Data-Informed Strategies for Better Member Engagement

By Julie Scullo

In the association world, member engagement is always a top priority – but it's not always a successful endeavor.

Most associations don't have an easy way to measure member engagement across all their different systems and touch points. And even when measured, it can be tricky to know how to use engagement scores to improve member experience and operational results.

In this post, we'll explore three strategies you can use to ensure you're making the right moves for more meaningful member engagement. You'll come away with specific examples from the team at the International Association of Exhibitions and Events (IAEE) that you can use to inform your own strategy.

### Strategy 1: Innovate and Differentiate

What can your association do for members that others can't? Look to create new and innovative products and services for an underserved population in your membership.

With this strategy, you're not necessarily competing with current competitors, you're finding space that's less competitive or maybe not competitive at all. When looking to innovate and differentiate, IAEE took the following steps:

- **Step 1: Segment** – At IAEE, the team looked at several different membership segments that were underserved, identifying meeting and event planner members. Looking at their internal dashboard they could see that those individuals weren't engaging with the association due to a lack of available content.
- **Step 2: Explore** – In addition to reviewing the data in their dashboard, IAEE asked members in its annual member survey and in post webinar surveys about topics they'd like to learn more about. Once the team aggregated the data and they were able to form a hypothesis, test it and confirm a need.
- **Step 3: Create** – Once IAEE determined the need, they were able to develop content for those members, starting with an educational series of six webinars. These webinars were repurposed from existing content, along with content from committee members volunteering as subject matter experts. Additionally, the team was able to leverage certifications, one of which is a Workforce-ready certificate designed for members who are new to the industry.
- **Step 4: Communicate** – Once new content is developed for specific membership segments, your association needs to tell those members about it! For instance, at IAEE the team started with student members who could be interested in the Workforce-ready Certificate. In their last year as students, the association shared content about the certification program, offering opportunities for these students to take the course even though they could not certify. This helped to nurture and engage these members until they were eligible.

### Strategy 2: Double Down

With the Double Down strategy, you're looking for products, services, and member segments that are really working well for your association. Once you've identified what's working, you can reinvest, and promote those projects.

While the strategy is different from the Innovate and Differentiate strategy above, the steps are largely the same. Associations need to explore opportunities and options, segment their members, package content especially for those members, and then communicate the opportunity.

*At IAEE, in looking at their data, the team noticed that a large segment of members with the CEM designation attended webinars. Looking to enhance engagement opportunities for those members, the team dove further into the data and saw that many of these members worked in sales. From there, IAEE produced a three-part series of webinars that focused on topics specific to them. Providing extra education opportunities for these members also opened up a new source of non-dues revenue for the association.*

When it came to engaging their unengaged members, IAEE looked at what kinds of content their more engaged counterparts were consuming. They then promoted that content to unengaged members with similar profiles.

On the flip side of the Double Down strategy, IAEE was also able to identify activities and projects the team was spending time on that didn't offer much return on investment. As a result they were able to sunset three underperforming newsletters that required significant resources for the team.

### **Strategy 3: Ask and Observe**

With the Ask and Observe strategy, your team will look to both explicit data and implicit insights, validate those findings and then use them to continuously improve your programs and engagement.

Explicit data is the information you ask for from members in surveys, while implicit data is something you're able to infer based on preferences and interests. Both are important to consider because often, what people say and what they do won't match up.

For IAEE, it's important to keep a pulse on what members are asking and saying about the association's products and services.

The team likes to take advantage of every opportunity to **ask** members questions, from polls, to website forms, and longer annual surveys conducted through Survey Monkey. In order to track trends year-over-year, IAEE will repeat many of the same questions, adding in three or four additional questions about programs or services the team is testing.

When it comes to **observing** data, IAEE likes to focus on metrics including product and publication downloads, event registrations, email interaction, social media engagement, volunteer signups, and donations.

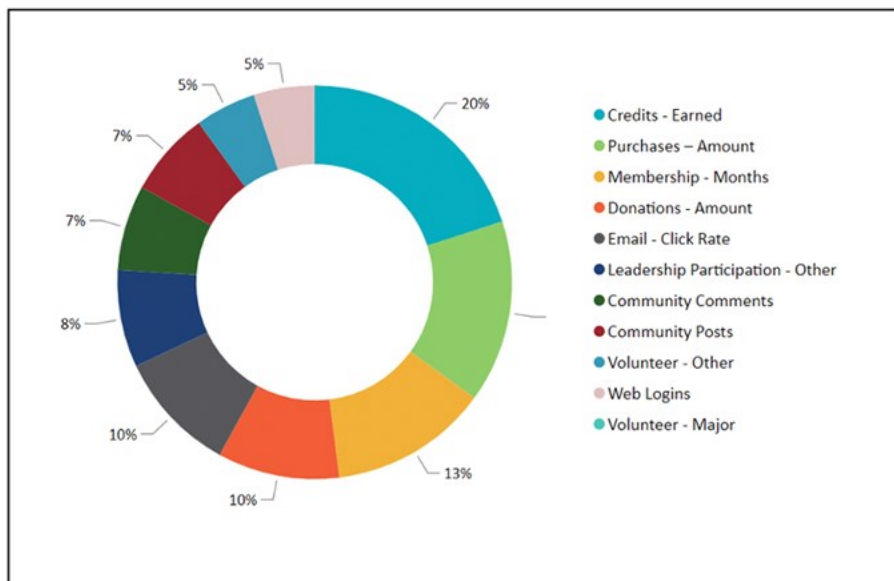
*One opportunity IAEE uses for observation is a series of small group discussions called Community Buzz Hours. These virtual sessions allow members to gain knowledge from other member experiences and collaborate to find common solutions. Each session has a themed topic and some sessions may include a 15-20-minute presentation.*

IAEE is able to use these sessions to mine for common problems members are facing, that the association can help them solve and identify areas where the association can develop new programs and products.

Associations want to ask *and* observe, and the answers collected should help to validate each other.

## Member engagement scoring and modeling removes the guesswork

Engagement is an exchange of value between your member and your association. The trick is to find the sweet spot where members feel they're getting value from joining and your association is getting value from those relationships.



When you're looking to identify trends and areas to improve member engagement at your association, it can feel overwhelming. All the different types of data and the individual data points can make it feel like you're searching for a needle in a haystack.

What if, instead of a haystack, you were able to visualize member engagement as pieces of a pie? In that pie, the sections represent activities and the size of the section corresponds to their importance. To build your own engagement model start simple: take the activities your members participate in and products they use, and assign a weight to them. [Watch this on-demand webinar](#) for a quick walk through how to do this (starts around 46 min mark).

Engagement scoring can simplify the process even further as engagement with activities and different products can add up to a certain engagement score specific to each member. Using engagement scores you're able to:

- See trends over time and how they have changed
- Define member personas (which members like which things) based on engagement activities
- Find potential event attendees, speakers, donors, volunteers and more
- Build a member journey from Interested (just learning) to Connected (donor or board member)

Not surprisingly, one of the biggest opportunities to meaningfully engage members for most associations is during an annual conference.

About the Author:

Julie Scullo is CEO of [Association Analytics](#) and Founder of Acumen. Acumen is the #1 provider of data and analytics software to the association community. In her role she has set out to change the way associations do business by giving them the ability to use data to make decisions with confidence and leverage insights that drive engagement and profitability. She is a Board member of Association Women Technology Champions. She volunteers with the Youth Mentorship Program and serves on the Public Schools Community Working Group for School Planning Committee. [Click here for Julie Scullo's LinkedIn Profile!](#)

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