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# Three Strategies to Elevate Your Impact This Year

Bill Conforti, SVP of Strategy & Solutions

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## Three Strategies to Elevate Your Impact This Year

By Bill Conforti, SVP of Strategy & Solutions

As the world of data and AI continues to rapidly evolve, associations need to adapt to meet the ever-changing needs of members and stakeholders. These changes may feel overwhelming, but there are easy things you can do with your current staff and resources that will help your association to thrive. Read on for three strategies to elevate your impact, along with ways to make small, easy changes that lead to large, impactful results.

### Collect the right kind of data on your members.

Talk to most association executives and they'll tell you that their data is not in the best place. They may focus on data they feel is missing, or the fact that their association's data is dirty and disorganized. Ask those same association executives what they're doing to solve their data issues and they'll likely say they have a staff member dedicated to cleaning things up, but it's a constant moving target.

There's no question about it: data collection can feel overwhelming and scary, and it can often feel like a challenge you'll never be able to overcome.

There is a solution. It's time for your association to take advantage of the Fresh Start Effect. All this takes is a commitment to each other to make a fresh start when it comes to data governance and data quality.

This is an approach you can take easily with the systems, tools, and staff you already have in place. At the same time, these simple steps can help to make a big impact on your data collection quality and how those data collection and quality issues affect your ability to make data-informed decisions.

So how do you make a Fresh Start?

- Be deliberate – If you can't tell members what you're going to do with the answer they're giving you, don't ask those questions.
- Be consistent – If you ask the same type of question regularly, use control questions that allow you to compare how you're doing over time that apply across the departments.
- Make it easy – Don't put unnecessary barriers in front of members like having different departments ask members the same question, multiple times.
- Be creative – Make it fun for members by offering them an experience they want to participate in or a benefit they want in exchange for the data they're giving you. For instance, a speaker offered to give his book away for free to anyone who sent him a text with their contact information. Those attendees willingly shared their information thanks to a unique ask and compelling offer.

There are a couple of different ways you can approach the collection of data but first you'll want to do a data collection audit. A data audit doesn't need to be a scary undertaking, simply start by looking at your goals. You're collecting data because you want to make decisions based on it, so it's important to work backwards from the types of questions you want to answer to how you collect the data you need. Here are a couple of ways to gather the data, once you know what and why you're looking for it.

### Observe to learn members' preferences and interests.

You likely have data on the purchases your members are making, the events they're registering for and the content they're downloading. This is considered an implicit data collection method. Observing is the most valuable type of data. Often, your incomplete, dirty, or old data can be adjusted through observation and without disturbing your members. You should be able to observe data points that help fill in gaps such as years in the profession, years as a member, and member types.

Your members are also typically bad at self-identifying with what they actually want due to confirmation bias. For instance, Amazon doesn't ask customers for behavioral data. They simply observe what customers are shopping for to help inform the products and services they see in the future, giving weight to things viewed or searched more often.

### **Ask for the data you want.**

If observed data is not available, this is your next best option. You're probably already asking for this data on your application forms, in surveys and during event registration. This is considered an explicit data collection method.

As you think about the current methods you're using to ask members questions, consider one question you could add to one of those forms that would return highly valuable data. You should also consider which questions you may be able to retire.

The thing to remember is that it's not about asking too many questions, it's about asking the wrong questions the wrong way. Consider how you plan on using the info you're asking for and how to collect that info in a way that's consistent to make the data usable. Make sure you're collecting data that rarely changes, data that every member has available and data that would be a reliable unique identifier for each member. The most valuable type of data is something that will make it easier for your association to educate and inform that member. Examples of this kind of data would be your members' cell phone numbers. Those likely won't change despite job changes and will allow you to engage with them.

### **Get more serious and practical about AI.**

If associations want to make a big impact with AI, there needs to be more of a focus on the institutionalized aspects of using AI, starting with officially recognizing effective ways to use AI regularly. This is not suggesting going all-in or diving in blind. It's important to incorporate in a smart and scalable way. There are massive benefits to using AI, but a policy that shapes how your team uses it is an important starting point.

Cleaning up data can feel like a huge undertaking, but there are a few points to focus on to make it more doable. Start by identifying key areas where you can make a big impact with AI and then, as with any sort of organizational adoption, identify a group of key people who can be responsible for spearheading the adoption of AI. These will likely be senior level people in your organization responsible for crafting policy and encouraging participation. Ideally, this team will be a cross-functional one.

To be efficient and effective, training should be organized and should offer guidance on the types of things your association is looking to do with AI tools. It should also involve an emphasis on data privacy and ethics.

AI can be used for brainstorming, content creation, event planning, translations, data analysis, topic modeling, summary creation, and as chatbots or virtual assistants. With all these uses (and more!) documentation will come in handy. You'll want to consider creating guides for the different types of AI you expect your team to be using. If you're not sure where to start, we'd suggest looking at other organizations and forums for templates.

## Create and communicate your value proposition.

Why does your association lose members? While some members retire or simply forget to renew, more often there's an issue of relevance due to a lack of value clarity. This typically relates to your association's value proposition in one of two ways: you don't have very much value, or you're not communicating that value effectively.

Your value proposition is the unique statement of the value your association offers to its members and it's a promise of what members receive by joining. It should be clear and compelling and focus on the benefits that only members receive. What would they notice if their membership with your association went away? If you don't know what those things are, it's especially difficult to recruit and retain members.

The best way to see the value that current members get from you is to have a full view of all their touch points. With information pulled together from their interactions with you in your Learning Management System (LMS), Community, Events and more you can begin to give value to their activities and answer questions like, what do members want or need most, and what types of members want what types of things.

An Engagement Model is a great way to measure how your members (and non-members) interact with your products and services. Using an engagement model will demonstrate how effectively you're communicating your association's value proposition and how it resonates with your audience. It can also be used to help inform changes to make to improve your value.

**By focusing on strategic data collection, embracing AI as a practical tool, and refining your value proposition, you have the opportunity, not only to stay relevant, but to become an influential force that shapes the future of your members and industry.**

### About the Author:

Bill is an association industry thought leader and content contributor who speaks frequently at industry events and conferences, as well as hosting regular webinars and educational sessions related to data analytics, customer engagement, data strategy and governance, digital marketing and more.

He has more than 20 years in software products and services with experience ranging from strategy, operations, consulting, business development, human resources, and program management. As Senior Vice President of Strategy & Solutions at Association Analytics, Bill is a hands-on executive working across departments to support sales, development, continuous improvement, and delivery of our products and services to provide the best value and customer experience.

Prior to joining [Association Analytics](#), Bill was Vice President at EastBanc Technologies, a software development and services company. During his time there, he helped drive growth from an 8-person startup to more than 100 staff with several successful products launched over 10+ years.

### More related resources from this Author:

Read more about preparing your association's data for AI in [this recent blog](#).

[Learn more about value proposition in this on-demand webinar](#)

Download our [Getting Started with Member Engagement Scoring guide](#) to learn more about this model and how to successfully track and score member engagement.

Dive deeper into these strategies by [watching this on-demand webinar](#).

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