

**TIME IS  
RUNNING  
OUT**

**IMPORTANT  
MEMBERSHIP  
INFORMATION  
ENCLOSED**

**CALL  
TODAY  
TO RENEW**

**NEW  
OFFERINGS**

**ARE YOU  
KEEPING  
THE MEMBERS  
WHO WANT  
TO STAY?**  
BY JAY YOUNGER

**EASILY  
RENEW  
ONLINE**

**JOIN  
TODAY**

**MEMBERSHIP  
RENEWAL  
IN  
MINUTES**

**CONTACT  
US  
NOW**



In a recent survey of former members, a national scientific association asked, “What is the primary reason you allowed your membership to lapse?” Surprisingly, nearly 30 percent of respondents answered that they were unaware they had not renewed.

The association was surprised by the findings as well, as most of the typical retention and renewal processes were in place. The association communicated regularly with members through e-mail and traditional mail. Its renewal series had multiple vehicles and was staggered properly. The database was not compromised; it was well-managed and up-to-date. Communications were personalized and effectively laid out the benefits of membership. The staff was experienced and well qualified to manage the renewal process. Yet 30 percent of its lapsed members — individuals who wanted to retain their membership in the organization — lapsed either because they didn’t recall being asked to renew or thought they had already paid their dues.

Of course, the example is not unique to one association, but rather a common symptom of the current milieu in associ-

ation marketing. As many associations are all too aware, today’s members are busier than ever and often miss critical communications. The saturation members face in e-mail, advertising and postal mail leads to a climate in which key messages can get misplaced or simply forgotten. Unfortunately, membership renewal is not immune to this condition.

The fact is that even members who want to renew may not be able to find the time or inclination to take the final step. The few percentage points represented by these members may mean the difference between an organization that is growing and one that is shrinking. Is this happening at your organization? Before you start planning your next recruitment campaign to replace the members you lost, take stock of the following options to ensure you’re keeping everyone who wants to stay.



## RESEARCH

As the example at the beginning of this article illustrates, there is some percentage of members who will inadvertently let their membership lapse. If the association can isolate these individuals from the various other categories that lead to attrition — leaving the profession, retirement or a change in location — you can isolate messages to this key group of “at risk” members.



## SIMPLIFY PROCESSES

Many associations are moving to a new way of collecting dues by using automated payment processes. Collecting dues via credit card is nothing new, but for some associations, allowing members more flexibility and recurring payment options are leading to good results. For example, the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance saw a marked impact on retention after implementing quarterly payment and annual automatic billing plans designed to simplify membership payments. AAHPERD uses software that loads members' credit card numbers, expiration dates and billing terms then charges all the cards for the period specified. Of course, members agree to the terms in advance. Once all the charges are verified, AAHPERD uploads the transactions into a test database to make sure all records were processed correctly. If any corrections need to be made, they are made in the live database and the final transactions are updated in members' activity records and batch posted. Roughly 10 percent of AAHPERD's 23,000 members take advantage of the offer, which, according to membership director Eric Berkowitz, has been a tremendous success. "All in all, it's a pretty painless process," he says. "We have about a 15 percent higher retention rate in our professional member category for members who use the quarterly payment plan." This equates to many of the studies we conduct in which 10 to 20 percent of lapsed members say they weren't aware their membership had lapsed.



## VARIED COMMUNICATION

Curtis Nunley, director of membership retention at the American Society of Civil Engineers, tackled the challenge of new members by employing a more robust and tailored communications campaign. As with most professional societies, ASCE members in their first three years renew at a far lower rate than the overall average. To combat this, ASCE has implemented an integrated campaign to increase awareness of its benefits and encourage participation among members in the one- to three-year window. "We have improved new member retention by increasing the number of touches a new member receives during their first three years of membership," Nunley says. The campaign consists of a variety of staggered communications, including a postcard series that outlines the various benefits of membership and "welcome calls." "Overall, we've seen that the campaign has helped to increase new member retention by more than 15 percent," Nunley says.

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## TIMING

In some cases, a slight adjustment to a process that is already in place is the difference between modest and remarkable results. For one professional association, lapsed member telemarketing already was being conducted to encourage lapsed members to rejoin the association. However, an analysis of the renewal series showed that almost three months separated the final printed communication and the start of the telemarketing campaign. By this time, many lapsed members could have learned to "live without" membership. Working with its outsourced partners, the association condensed the time frame in which lapsed calls were initiated, targeting 30 days after the termination date. In the first month of the new timing, the telemarketing campaign yielded an increased return of approximately 30 percent.



## "DISINCENTIVES"

For the bold of heart, one additional tactic that has been proven to get results is the equivalent to a membership "restocking" fee. Some associations charge initial application fees of \$35-\$50 to process new member applications. While the policy does cause some member complaints, and can be a barrier to membership, certain societies are able to charge the application fee with little impact on recruitment. Certainly, the association can typically show justification for such a fee based on costs associated with data processing, mailing and other member services that are delivered upon commencement of an individual's membership. To combat churn, some associations will apply the fee to lapsed members that allow their membership to remain inactive for more than one year. A well-timed reminder of the policy just prior to termination can help ensure that members take the call to action to renew seriously.

Of course, determining which of these processes will have the best results for your association is a matter of experience. Indeed, as with most marketing tactics, the so-called "three cardinal rules" of marketing still apply — test, test and test some more.

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