Marketing professional associations

There are hundreds of professional associations, representing every imaginable industry and career path. There is even an association for associations (or at least for association executives): ASAE. The ASAE has been advertising itself on TV lately, something I have never seen before. It is doing it mostly on Sunday morning talk shows, and the campaign is called the Power of A.

Associations, like other donor or member-based organizations, have to work to maintain the number of donors or members. A drop is serious, as it means a cut in income. At the same time, these associations or organizations have to work extra hard to entice people to join.

In the last few weeks, several associations I could be a member of because of my profession, have been having membership drives. They are offering one or more of the following:

- Reduced membership costs
- Gifts with membership
- Waived application fees

Do these enticements work? I think the one that works the best is reduced membership costs, **IF** there is sufficient benefit to joining. And therein lies the problem. Often, these associations have events that are open to the public. Non-members pay more than members. If you like what you see, and you want to go to more events, perhaps membership is worth it, in pure cash value. However, you can still go when you want even if you aren't a member. But what else does membership offer? What exclusive, member-only benefits does the association offer? What can you get nowhere else?

In some cases, people want the “cachet” of being a member. Or they want the opportunity to network, or raise their leadership profile by serving on committees and boards. All these are valid reasons to join. Being an association member shows that you are really interested in/committed to the field.

Another issue is that there may be several associations representing your field. Which do you choose? In my case, I could be in the American Marketing Association, Public Relations Society of America, International Association of Business Communicators, the Association for Women in Communications, and so forth. For me, the problem is the cost of joining is not subsidized by an employer, since I work for myself. I have to choose carefully. And yes, the money incentive works. Making it more affordable to join is an incentive.

Bottom line is memberships have to do with cost and value. Providing sufficient value for members makes membership worthwhile.

What makes you join an association? Is it worth it?

