

# **Crafting Impactful Messages: How to Create Association Content that Resonates**

Leading with an audience-centric perspective when communicating with members can deliver more compelling and persuasive narratives





## *What's in it for me?*

It's a selfish question, but one your audience is always asking. They want to know what's in it for them to join your association, attend your conference, enroll in your continuing education program, or even read your blog or social media posts. Will it help them advance their career? Connect them with mentors or thought leaders? Provide them with key insights or valuable skills?

A lot of association communications aren't written with these questions in mind. They're written from the point of view of the association, not the audience.

Many organizations sprinkle phrases such as "choose from 100-plus conference sessions" or "receive our weekly newsletter delivered right to your inbox" across their website and social media platforms to highlight their offerings, but what your audience wants to read and hear are things like this:

*You'll learn tips and tricks that will enable you to get the ear of your CEO — and maybe an office closer to hers.*

*Every job I've ever gotten came from a lead I received from someone I met at a networking event at the conference.*

These messages resonate more strongly because they adopt the perspective of your audience members. The latter message is particularly effective because it comes from a peer — someone who can speak to the benefits of attending a conference from personal experience.

## Speak Your Audience's Language

Audience-centric communications start with the headline or subject line. They're the first thing your audience sees when scanning email messages or scrolling through your newsletter. You have only a fraction of a second to get their attention. What will you say?

An association-centric headline will read as follows: *ABC Association Launches New Tool to Boost Skills.*

An audience-centric headline will read more like this: *Get Qualified for the Job You Want.*

Assuming your headline gets their attention, you have to keep your audience engaged. The first sentence and paragraph are critical to this goal. The longer people read something, the more likely they are to continue reading all the way through.

An association-centric first paragraph will read as follows: *ABC Association has created a new tool that is designed to help industry members boost their skills development in areas where they might otherwise need more education and/or work experience to qualify for higher-paying positions.*

An audience-centric first paragraph will read like this: *Want a better job but worried you aren't qualified? Expand your skills (and your job opportunities) with a new tool from ABC Association.*

By framing the headline and first paragraph in audience-centric terms, you are much more likely to get your message across than if you take an association-centric approach. Your audience is asking "what's in it for me?" and you're answering them in language they understand, which, in this case, means a better chance to get a better job. The tool your association is launching is only a means to that end.

Another advantage to adopting an audience-centric perspective is that it precludes the need for you to be a subject-matter expert in your audience's field. In the above example, taking an association-centric approach (*ABC Association has created a new tool ...*) puts the focus on the tool, which you will then need to describe. An audience-centric approach (*Want a better job ...*) puts the emphasis on your audience members and their innate desire to improve their personal circumstances. That's a desire we all understand.

## Developing Compelling Content with Expertise

There will be times, though, when you as a marketer or content creator will need to speak with expertise related to your association's industry. Creating quality content in a specialized industry, especially when you're not an expert within that field, can be challenging. Fortunately, there are several strategies you can use to produce valuable content that resonates with your target audiences and sets your organization apart as a thought leader.

### 1. Leverage the experience of your association's leaders and volunteers.

One of the first steps toward creating quality content with expertise is getting familiar with the ins and outs of the industry. You can start this research by tapping into your association's leaders and volunteers.

Often, these highly engaged members are also knowledgeable industry experts who are excited to discuss the nuances of their profession and the details of their work. Schedule a 15-30-minute informal meeting with them to gather background information and data about the industry. Ask them to provide a "day-in-the-life"

perspective, which can give a firsthand look at the wins and challenges they face. This direct input from industry insiders will help you understand the particulars of the field, giving you a foundation for creating expert content.

### 2. Interview subject-matter experts within your association or industry.

When writing longer-form content such as blog posts, guides, etc., conduct interviews with subject-matter experts (aka your association's members) to draft content that stands out. These interviews provide quotes and other insights that offer a unique perspective that can't be easily replicated by others, making your content more credible and engaging.

### 3. Ask your SMEs to verify industry jargon and clarify any gray areas.

While creating content, ensure that you're using industry-specific jargon correctly. To achieve this, involve your SMEs in the review process. Share your content with them and ask them to verify the accuracy of technical terms and terminology. If you're tasked with writing content that may be a bit more complex, ask your SMEs to provide feedback on areas you may need clarity on.

## 4. Encourage members to contribute content.

If your association has a blog or publication, consider inviting members to contribute. This may require some initial legwork, including creating content guidelines, developing review processes, etc., but the payoff is worth it. Members have unique perspectives and experiences to share, adding diversity and authenticity to your content, as well as giving them an additional outlet to connect with their community and volunteer with the association.

## 5. Harness the power of AI.

There are numerous generative AI tools that can help get marketers familiar with a profession or industry they're working with. These tools can assist in multiple ways:

- **Explaining industry concepts:** Use AI to explain complex industry concepts or terms you may not fully grasp.
- **Identifying trends and challenges:** Ask AI to identify the latest trends or challenges within the industry, providing you with up-to-date information and potential hot topics to address in your marketing.

- **Brainstorming relevant topics:** AI can help generate content ideas and even provide outlines on how you can address the topics your members care about.

### Note:

While AI can assist in brainstorming and content planning, it's essential to fact check any AI-generated copy and use it as an outline or starting draft, not as a publishable final piece. The human touch goes a long way.

By implementing these strategies, your association can create content and distribute communications that put your audience first, letting your members see your association's value upfront. When you write to answer the question "what's in it for me?" from the member perspective, your content will resonate with their individual aspirations and highlight how your benefits will impact them in a tangible way.

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MCI's U.S. headquarters is in the Washington, D.C., area with offices in New York, Baltimore, Dallas and Chicago.



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