

7 Steps for Overcoming Obstacles to Engagement and Participation

You've got a community. You take the time to post links, to share updates and to try to generate excitement among your association members. According to the "book," you're doing it all right. You should have it made.

But, at the end of each day, when you reflect on your efforts, there's something missing. Your members aren't participating like you hoped they would. In fact, many times, your efforts feel like a one-sided conversation with cyber space.

What's missing? Participation and true engagement. If you're throwing things out into the online world but not receiving anything in return, you're falling short.

This doesn't mean your online community is a failure. It doesn't mean that you're doing anything wrong. It doesn't mean that your community isn't online (according to a [Pew Research Study](#), 74% of adults are active on social media). It DOES mean that a change in strategy could yield big results. Think of it as an opportunity, not a failure.

Ready for success? Ready for your efforts to pay off? Check out these 7 steps for overcoming obstacles to engagement and participation.

1. Make Sure You're Off to the Right Start

Here's the thing. You could be doing EVERYTHING right on Instagram, Twitter or Instagram. But, if that's not the right platform for your association, no amount of effort is going to make a difference.

Think about your association members and how they communicate. Where do they spend their time online? Effectively communicating means you need to be in the right place to start.

One way to ensure you're off to the right start? Consider a dedicated platform that's focused on associations like yours like Social HubSite. Social HubSite is designed to help small trade associations engage, share and connect with their members. This means no distractions, nothing to keep them from focusing on your objectives.

2. Post Relevant Content

You might enjoy creating content or it might be a chore. Whichever boat you find yourself in, content is an easy way to attract attention that can lead to engagement. But, if that content is more in line with your interests than your members' interests, it's not going to help your cause.

Talk to you members. Find out what would help them in their professions and what they're interested in. Then, revamp your content strategy. Consider creating a calendar and setting up [Google alerts](#) to track news that is of interest to your target audience.

Relevancy leads to engagement: fact.

3. Ask Questions

Want your members to respond to you? Make it easy. Put the ball in their court: ask questions.

Questions make it easy for members to respond, it tells them what you're looking for. It starts discussions. Post an article that's relevant then ask for opinions. Take it to a personal level by asking about weekend plans. Ask for success stories. The options are endless; what matters is that you take the time to ask.

4. Respond to Answers

Here's the thing. Asking a question isn't enough. You need to demonstrate your own interest in your members' answers by responding.

When you respond to the questions you ask and to those that respond to those questions, you're showing that you care. You're also allowing discussions to flourish. Remember: two sided conversations matter online...they are a true sign of engagement.

5. Create Surveys

It takes 5 minutes to go to a site like [Survey Monkey](#) and to create a survey. From there, you can encourage members to take the survey.

From here, you can find valuable information relating to content, member benefit potential, how your association is perceived or something else altogether. It also gives your members a reason to visit your online community and to participate.

6. Consider some Controversy

Controversy doesn't have to mean taking a strong position that's going to anger half of your membership. Instead, it can be a springboard to deeper levels of engagement.

Think about the industry you serve. What matters to those involved in that industry? What questions have come up that has your members split? Consider taking a stand or sharing that you are ready to take a stand. Ask for opinions. Chances are, you'll receive more responses than you think.

7. Be Clear

If your members aren't sure how to respond to what you post, they might not respond at all. This doesn't mean they aren't interested, it just means engagement could stall.

When you need a specific action to happen – a like, a share, a website visit or something else – simply state it. Saying “we're looking for members willing to share this article on their Facebook pages,” is more effective than throwing something out there and hoping it happens. Clarity matters.

8. Call Out Influencers

We talk a lot about influencers. These are the individuals that participate regularly in person and online. They're the ones that other members look to before forming opinions. They're at the center of all association happenings.

Call them out in your community. This attracts their attention and the attention of those that are interested in what they have to say. You don't have to stick with influencers to increase engagement, you can also welcome new members, introduce specific members to the community or recognize members for their contributions to their communities and your association.

The more personal you're able to get, the more members will want to participate in your community.

Are you ready to make a difference in 2016? Are you ready to overcome obstacles to participation will increasing engagement like never before? It doesn't have to be an uphill battle.