

Association Involvement Can Increase Visibility

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Viewing the growing pile of papers on your desk and reading the hundreds of e-mails that flood your inbox each day can often make it seem impossible to remove yourself from the office setting, not to mention the time and financial squeeze we are all feeling these days. However, getting involved with associations will not only enhance your visibility, your business image and sales, it can also give you a mood boost, resulting in renewed energy that you can bring back to the office.

While you may already be a member of your own professional association, you should be aware that there are literally thousands of associations and organizations across the country; the trick is finding the ones that are right for you and for your business.

The most comprehensive resource is the Encyclopedia of Associations, which can be found in most larger libraries or purchased for as little as \$50 on Amazon (list price is over \$500). Of course, you can also look on line and search for associations in your geographic area. Other resources include MarketingSource.com where you can purchase an entire directory (a portion of the Directory of Associations) or select specific areas, for example you can choose New York State which has 2,387 listings at a cost of \$250. Many national organizations have local chapters and the Encyclopedia will indicate the location of local chapters, as well as dates of annual conferences and the types of publications each association produces.

Associations afford many opportunities for increasing visibility. Here are a few:

Attend Meetings: Although this sounds too simple to even mention, you would be surprised at how many people join an organization, get their name in the directory, and think business is going to come their way. It is only after you attend meetings and get to know other members that they look you up in the membership directory when they need your product or services. Make it a goal to regularly attend meetings to increase familiarity with you and your business.

Advertise in Association Publications: Advertise in group publications regularly. This could include newsletters, bulletins, directories and annual journals. These ads tend to be very inexpensive compared to other advertising vehicles and you may be able to take a larger ad than you could in the local business newspaper. You will reach a small targeted audience that will appreciate your support of the organization.

Write and Submit Articles: Often association publications are hungry for well written articles that enlighten their readers on a particular topic such as a new law or regulation, an event recently in the news, or even seasonal tips and advice.

Speak for the Group: Associations often invite their own members to participate in programming such as speaking on a particular topic, hosting a roundtable discussion or joining a panel discussion. Let your associations know about your expertise and the topics you could discuss.

Spotlight or Participate in a Trade Show: Associations can offer opportunities to spotlight your business at a regular meeting or at an annual trade show. Hosting a table and displaying your products or literature is a great way to meet members and introduce them to your products or services. Also, consider speaking at a trade show or supplying a gift to be used as a giveaway.

Join a Committee or Board: One of the best ways to increase your visibility (and learn a thing or two) is to join a committee or association board. If you don't have a lot of time to spare, a committee can be a good way to start; board positions often require a larger time commitment but are an excellent way to meet people. This is a terrific source of visibility and one that is often overlooked because of the time commitment. However, contacts made through committee positions can often prove invaluable.

If there are several organizations that you feel would be valuable for your business, you don't have to join them all yourself. Assign different people in the organization to different associations and request that they provide you with feedback on the group and its activities. Remember, don't judge a group too quickly; give your membership time to have an impact on your business.

Finally, meeting new people, making new connections and getting some fresh ideas, can really improve your motivation in this difficult business climate and give you positive energy to pass along to others in your office.

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