



## The Super Trends facing Associations – November 2006

If one could forecast what the future holds, one could take advantage of the future by preparing for it. In 2005 ASAE conducted an environmental scan to determine what the strategic trends are that will affect the association community. The following provides a list of what these trends are and some thoughts how to take advantage of them.

The eight (8) Super Trends are:

1. Demassification
2. Unbundling
3. Scrimping
4. Wave 3.1
5. Virtualization
6. Cyber-Mobbing
7. Scrutiny
8. Counter-Americanism

**Demassification** is challenging an association to know their members well. The mass market is breaking into smaller pieces and greater differences in lifestyle, preferences, and priorities are segmenting the population even more. Not all members of an association want the same thing. This trend is demanding that an association identifies different groups so that those common needs or interests can be satisfied. An association has to have some method to better understand members' wants and needs so that they can respond to those wants and needs more effectively. The new 3-year CSAE Strategic Plan talks about targeting different member segments and associations need to adopt this posture as well. Some ways an association can better understand what their members want is by surveying members, developing a policy on diversity, interviewing members that leave and including tracks in their conference program.

**Unbundling** is the trend that challenges associations to be more competitive. They must be able to offer their products and services a la carte rather than in a bundle. The value of an association to its membership is giving them what they want. By breaking up the bundle of products and services for members, they can choose what they want that gives them the most value. In competing with other similar associations, one size does not fit all and this trend is affecting associations and their membership. An association needs to offer their products and services in smaller pieces so members can choose those products and services that they want the most. To respond to this trend an association could survey members, track members usage of products and services to determine those not being requested, conduct focus groups, provide listserv access or provide a members' only area of the website with targeted request for feedback.

**Scrimping** addresses the return on the investment of being a member. Unbundling had provided the member more choice but at the same time the value of the membership may be less. Is the membership fee now worth it for what is delivered? The association has to either reduce the membership fee or add more value in terms of products and services to prop up the perceived value of the member. Now that the membership market is more segmented, products and services need to be added that satisfy those different groups as well. Possible answers to what to add could be a membership directory, easy access to industry news, clearer articulation of membership benefits, access to affinity programs or the opportunity to participate in advocacy.

**Wave 3.1** clearly speaks to how an association can take advantage of technology. Alvin Toffler's "third wave" talked about the shift from the industrial society to the information-based society. Now we are in the knowledge-based society and an association must be able to provide knowledge for members to respond to this trend. Members need to be able to go to one place for what they need to learn and develop professionally. By providing a well rounded offering to help the member grow it secures their membership but provides a stronger advocate to represent the association. The path to increasing member knowledge could be accomplished by supplying best practices or access to professional sites in the association industry, identifying sponsors that can help a member learn, information on legislation affecting the association and access to sites with educational opportunities.

**Virtualization** challenges associations to recognize that society is changing the behaviour of customers and its members. Traditional neighbourhoods and communities are disintegrating and the appeal of the web-based experience is more appealing. An association is a community builder of like-minded people and it needs to sustain that to secure that value for its members. By offering the service on the web an association addresses the society that is highly mobile and needs access to the knowledge an association has to offer anywhere and anytime it is convenient for the member. And an association does not need to do it all themselves. Think of a sponsor that can provide members news on innovative products and services in their industry. Special interest groups (SIGs) could provide members an opportunity to increase knowledge of the association's industry. If members were not able to attend their conference, provide those sessions online so the member can listen to them at their convenience. These few examples can feed the member what they need to know on their terms.

**Cyber-Mobbing** is the current method to advocate an association's position in those public offices where you need support. By using the web and other methods to bring attention to your association's issues and gain support for them, an association must be able to garner support as a community of its own. The public arena is crowded and associations have to be creative in getting the attention that they feel they deserve for this cause. "Swarm advocacy" and "swarm mobbing" are the two methods that associations need to practice to get their issues addressed as a result of this study. By working with other competitive associations you can lobby for support via the internet. Contact your MPP or MP that is most aligned with your issue and keep them informed. Link those professional sites that share your issues and keep them informed to gain their support. These are just a few ways to consider how to create support for advocating your issues.

**Scrutiny** is all about oversight. And we don't mean overlooking but overseeing what an associations is up to so that members are aware. Transparency is becoming critical to governance, advocacy and government relations. Just as Enron and Worldcom increased the awareness that organizations need to answer to those shareholders, by putting policies and procedures in place, you can be confident that you are satisfying the needs of your association stakeholders. Bill C-21 was left on the table when the Martin government was dissolved, but now Bill C-2 is putting accountability in place for all organizations. Ways that an association can respond to this trend are to publish the position on this practice on the website for all membership to review. Provide assessment tools for the Board of Directors and the staff. Look at the Balanced Scorecard as a vehicle to satisfy transparency and seek legal counsel for any contracting work.

**Counter-Americanism** does not relate specifically to Canadian associations, however, for those national or international associations that are global you need to develop a local model to satisfy the local requirements to be successful. Diversity will impact you in putting your association in place in the global community as well. Partnering with others resident in the local area to develop localized models for association culture, governance and operations will help you as well developing diverse value packages for non-North American members.

These Super Trends provide Canadian Associations a focus on which to strategize how to respond. Taking advantage of them will provide you an opportunity to let your members know that they matter. The research has been done. Canadian associations can now take advantage of the results to serve their members better and continue to make a better Canada.

Seen enough and don't know where to call.

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