

Feedback - Mini-survey No. 1 - Services

Overview

This report summarises the approach of trade associations to the **services** they offer based on some 70 responses to the on-line questionnaire launched in March 2007. This covered 27 types of services grouped under the following headings:

Information	Events	Marketing	Specialist	Business	Affinity
Publications	Conferences	Exhibitions/	Info & advice	Services	Services
Newswires	Seminars	Shows	Legal	Consultancy	Legal Helpline
Newsletters	Workshops	Export	Health & Safety	Benchmarking	Insurance/
Magazines	Courses	Market info	HR	Product Testing	Health Pensions
	Lunch /Dinner	Statistics	Technical		Purchasing
	Awards		Environmental		Advertising
	Social				

The feedback is in two main parts:

- This **Overview** with a summary and commentary
- A **Totals** report with a tabulated summary of the responses

How to use the findings

Start here! This document provides an overview of the responses. It picks out highlights and includes summaries of the responses to open-ended questions for which there are no tabulations.

The Totals and Details reports group responses by service type and show for each:

- how many associations offer it,
- the financial rationale for offering it,
- how delivery is organised,
- what competition is faced and
- the logic for introducing new services.

The **Totals** tabulation provides a readily legible summary of the overall responses.

This summary concludes with some '**Top Tips**' - ideas and practical solutions to share - offered by members of the Benchmarking panel.

Future Questionnaires

Do you have questions you would like to be covered in future mini-surveys?
If so, do let us know.

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Highlights

Services Offered

The services that are most widely offered tend to be well established. However, electronic 'newswires', which are now almost universal, have come up fast - 38% introduced in the last two years. Market information, environmental information / advice and on-line advertising are also recently introduced for many.

Discontinued services include not only printed newsletters - clearly displaced by electronic news - but also events - notably social activities and in some cases seminars and workshops.

Most widely offered	
Electronic 'newswires'	91%
Technical information / advice	90%
Publications	86%
Seminars	83%
Workshops	74%
Health & Safety Information / advice	73%
Market information	71%
Annual Lunch / Dinner	70%
Conferences	70%
Environmental information / advice	70%
Legal/contractual information / advice	70%
Training courses	69%
Legal helplines	59%
Statistical services	57%
Printed Newsletters	56%
Exhibitions / trade shows	53%
Awards	51%
HR Information / advice	47%
Insurance/ Pensions / healthcare	44%
Social Events -(e.g. golf days)	43%
Magazine	43%
On-line advertising	37%
Benchmarking for members	34%
Bulk purchasing / discounts	34%
Consultancy	34%
Export Services	31%
Product Testing / certification	13%

Started in last 2 years	
Electronic 'newswires'	39%
Market information	16%
Environmental information / advice	16%
On-line advertising	11%
Benchmarking for members	10%
Statistical services	9%
Awards	9%
Insurance/ Pensions / healthcare	9%
Conferences	7%
Training courses	7%
Legal helplines	7%
Printed Newsletters	7%
Bulk purchasing / discounts	7%
Conferences	7%
Training courses	7%
Legal helplines	7%
Printed Newsletters	7%
Bulk purchasing / discounts	7%
Workshops	6%
Legal/contractual information / advice	6%
Exhibitions / trade shows	6%
Consultancy	6%

Discontinuation

Low take-up and lack of support are common reasons for discontinuation but comments indicate that some social events are seen as 'old-fashioned' and even 'sexist' (golf days?). Some discontinuation is adaptation, with the style of events being updated to new formats.

Discontinued in last 2 years	
Printed Newsletters	20%
Social Events -(e.g. golf days)	11%
Annual Lunch / Dinner	7%
Seminars	6%
Workshops	6%

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Financial Rationale

There is a clear preference for funding information and advisory services from subscriptions. Events are generally expected to produce a worthwhile contribution but major set-piece events such as exhibitions, conferences and dinners are often seen as critical to association finances.

Fund from subscriptions	
Electronic 'newswires'	95%
Environmental information / advice	94%
Technical information / advice	90%
Legal/contractual information / advice	88%
Health & Safety Information / advice	86%
HR Information / advice	85%
Printed Newsletters	85%
Benchmarking for members	83%
Legal helplines	80%
Statistical services	75%
Market information	74%
Publications	45%
Product Testing / certification	44%
Insurance/ Pensions / healthcare	42%
Consultancy	42%
Bulk purchasing / discounts	42%
Magazine	37%
Export Services	36%
On-line advertising	23%
Awards	22%

Critical to Finances	
Exhibitions/trade shows	40%
Conferences	20%
Training courses	16%
Awards	16%
Annual Lunch / Dinner	14%

Expect worthwhile contribution	
On-line advertising	57%
Training courses	45%
Product Testing / certification	33%
Conferences	26%
Consultancy	25%
Publications	23%
Workshops	23%
Exhibitions/trade shows	21%
Bulk purchasing / discounts	20%
Seminars	20%
Annual Lunch / Dinner	20%
Magazine	20%

Delivery

Among respondents, the delivery of services is predominantly by staff within the trade association. The existence of separate commercial subsidiary companies is limited to one or two. The limited number of temporary / ad hoc arrangements are mainly connected with events.

Outsourced or Commercial Partner	
Legal helplines	47%
Legal/contractual information / advice	44%
Insurance/ Pensions / healthcare	40%
Health & Safety Information / advice	33%
HR Information / advice	29%
Magazine	24%
Environmental information / advice	20%

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Competition

It is clearly advantageous for membership purposes to offer services where little or no competition is experienced. There are areas where this appears to be the case. However, there is also considerable commercial competition, particularly in relation to events and information.

Professional institutes are a source of competition in relation to events and training and some aspects of information. Business Links and Chambers of Commerce compete on advice and information services - Business Links slightly more so than Chambers.

Little or no competition	
Publications	51%
Annual Lunch / Dinner	47%
Technical information / advice	46%
Printed Newsletters	41%
Statistical services	31%
Awards	30%
Social Events -(e.g. golf days)	30%
Environmental information / advice	30%
Market information	29%
Health & Safety Information / advice	29%
Workshops	27%
Legal/contractual information / advice	26%
Conferences	24%
Seminars	21%
Benchmarking for members	20%

Business Links and Chambers	
Legal/contractual information / advice	14%
Export Services	13%
HR Information / advice	13%
Seminars	11%
Health & Safety Information / advice	10%
Market information	9%
Training courses	7%
Consultancy	6%
Environmental information / advice	6%
Legal helplines	6%
Publications	6%

Commercial providers	
Seminars	50%
Training courses	46%
Workshops	39%
Conferences	37%
Health & Safety Information / advice	37%
Legal helplines	36%
Legal/contractual information / advice	34%
Environmental information / advice	34%
Market information	33%
Insurance/ Pensions / healthcare	33%
Exhibitions/trade shows	31%
Publications	30%
Technical information / advice	29%
Magazine	27%
HR Information / advice	26%
On-line advertising	23%
Consultancy	21%
Statistical services	20%

Professional institutes	
Seminars	34%
Training courses	29%
Workshops	26%
Conferences	21%
Technical information / advice	19%

New Services

Respondents were asked to indicate what factors contributed to the decision, where they had introduced new services in the last 2 years (multi-answer question). Member demand predominates but 'Response to policy/legislation' figured strongly in relation to environmental information / advice.

Drivers for new services	
Member demand	37
Opportunistic- supply available	34
Market Research	27
Modelled on what other TAs are doing	22
Response to policy / legislation	17

General Approach to Services

Some members seem to object to associations making money out of them through services while others see it as fairer that those who make use of the services should pay from them through user charges (rather than the cost falling on the membership as a whole).

Given the above statement, respondents were asked for the view in their association about charging for services. There is a clear pattern in the response, but with some interesting variations:

- There is a general belief that the association should provide core information and advisory services from central funds. (Representation would also be core, but was not specifically covered here).
- There is also a very general view that where services give rise to individual benefit (e.g. training, events, publications), the user should pay.
- Many comment that paid for services should be seen as good value and not exorbitant in cost. User charges are sweetened by making clear a differential between the member and non-members rates.
- Many commented that a resistance to subscription increases is reducing resistance to user charges.
- The same restraints do not apply to commercial services (such as trade shows, exhibitions, overseas activities) that contribute directly to the business performance of member companies. These need to be positioned differently but by offering commercial advantage can generate significant income for the association.
- Many also mentioned the growing role of sponsorship (to be covered in a future mini-survey).

Further comments included:

- The importance of transparency - being straight with members. Although some will always whinge, most accept that services have to be paid for.
- Members only take up services that they find useful to their businesses.
- Linking services with strategic objectives helps ensure that services are relevant to members
- Structure can help in positioning services - e.g. offering commercially priced services through a subsidiary company
- Signs of a generational shift. Younger members expect to pay for what they want rather than joining a club.

Impact of commercial services on legitimacy

Some associations feel that their legitimacy as a representative body may be compromised if a very significant proportion of income is raised from commercial services rather than from membership subscriptions.

Given the above statement, very few respondents felt that there was a risk of transgressing boundaries.

- Most felt that there was plenty of scope to increase commercial income without detrimental effect.
- Some argued that the proportion of the sector in membership and the quality of representational work gave rise to legitimacy rather than the source of the association's income.
- Some felt that there was an unspoken upper limit (50% - 60%) on the proportion of income that should come from non-subscription sources.
- There appears to be a growing acceptance that it is appropriate to diversify income and reduce risk through services.
- Depending on the composition of the membership, associations may have to avoid competing with their members in services - e.g. consultancy.

Significant New Products and Improvements

New and updated services mentioned by respondents included:

- Shift of information to a member 'Extranet'
- Roster of business advisers set up to help members with business growth.
- Greatly expanded events programme now offered regionally
- Renegotiated insurance arrangements with substantial cost savings
- Segmentation of members for better targeted services
- Manufacturers' Forum launched
- Design and print service launched
- New CAD software modules launched
- New test machine developed
- Consumer facing website with 'Find a Builder' service to promote members
- Consultancy support services introduced
- Study tours and networking events introduced
- Energy buying scheme launched
- On-line membership payment /renewal

There is also evidence of a considerable amount of updating and renewal of existing services through redesign and rebranding of communication and materials, refocussing of activities and refreshing the offer - e.g. of events.

Many comment that it is still too soon to assess the impact of these improvements but refer to favourable comments from members and others. Some have seen membership growth, others increased uptake / sales of services.

Ideas and Practical solutions to share

A selection of contributions from panel members quoted verbatim:

- We significantly increased our lobbying - primarily technical rather than big P political - and promote it as a member service. Relevant and well communicated, it receives a highly positive response.
- Keep reinventing yourself. Bring old membership benefits to the top of your list every now and then (no reason why they'll not be as popular today as they were when you introduced them). Try to introduce new incentives and schemes each year. Offer special deals (join now and save X) as these really do help you to sell membership. Oh - and use video as a medium to sell the benefits of membership. Simple talking-head interviews with existing members saying why they are members really does work - really easy to put on your website so cheap to distribute.
- We just started talking to members. As a management team our job is to ensure that members' hard-earned cash is wisely invested in delivering new benefits that they actually need. They can articulate the challenges they face but it's up to us to find the solution. As we get it right we grow in confidence and our ability to sell is seriously augmented. We don't fight non-members, if they don't have any problems then they have no need of us. If we don't think we're right for them, we won't take their money - this shocks them but it certainly keeps you front of mind.
- Get off the fence and don't be "safe"
- Communication and PR , being pro-active, lots of lobbying, always treat the association as a commercial business with a need to have a real strategy and key objectives, recruit people from industry not from not for profit backgrounds (just an opinion)
- Providing quality networking opportunities has been key to increased membership. Actual tangible benefit is difficult to measure (and difficult to quantify to a prospective member), but attendance invariably leads to new leads, new technology partnerships etc. Adopted a come and try it approach for target members.
- We offer comprehensive service to members - standards, training and qualifications, legal advice, seminars and news. We would be happy to provide further information on these services if required.
- The trade press are very keen for comment and input from the trade bodies. Use the trade press as a recruitment tool - often for zero cost.
- Develop relationships with other bodies within your industry - even if they are competing for members - better relationships = higher profile = more members
- Keep it simple - combine members database with online website to avoid duplicate administration. All 'secretary' titles deleted - staff now all have distinct job objectives on annual performance assessment. Work better organised as a result and staff morale very high.
- Members wanting more face-to-face contact - linking social events with meetings so that more members attend.