EvolvE OR ELSE

Association publishing teams that fail to adapt to a changing media ecosystem risk extinction. PAGE 14

PUBLISHING IN THE PANDEMIC PAGE 22
14
EVOLVE OR ELSE
Association publishing teams that fail to adapt to a changing media ecosystem risk extinction.
BY THOMAS MARCETTI

22 | COMMUNICATIONS IN A CRISIS

22 | PANDEMIC PUBLISHING PLAYBOOK
Creative ideas on how to be a better resource to members during the pandemic.
BY CARLA KALOGERIDIS

27 | WEBSITE WORDS THAT WORK
COVID-19 has exposed some shortcomings in many organizations’ communications strategies. Here are some association websites that are getting it right.
BY PAUL BERGERON

30 | A WORLD WITHOUT TRADE SHOWS
How can associations make their numbers in a world without trade shows?

32 | PIVOTING WHEN YOU CAN’T GET PHOTOGRAPHY
Here’s a good plan B when your photographer or subject is in pandemic lockdown.
BY KELLY McMURRAY

34 | DELIVER MORE VALUE THROUGH DELIBERATE DESIGN
From managing change to reimagining your publications, design thinking is one of the most potent approaches around.
BY THOMAS MARCETTI
The Days the Earth Stood Still
The Next Big Thing is here. We just don’t know what it is yet.

BY SCOTT OLDHAM

FACE TIME WITH NICHOLAS STROZZA, INTERPRO
TRANSLATION SOLUTIONS

Say What?
In a world growing smaller every day, translating your message to an international community is worth thinking about.

UNDER THE COVERS

Judge by the Cover
An inside view of the making of an award-winning magazine cover.

BY ELENA VERNIKOS
Pandemic Publishing Playbook

CREATIVE IDEAS ON HOW TO BE A BETTER RESOURCE TO MEMBERS DURING THE PANDEMIC FROM THREE BRIGHT-THINKING ASSOCIATIONS — NAIOP, AMERICAN STAFFING ASSOCIATION, AND WORLDWIDE ERC — AND A COUPLE BONUS IDEAS FOR GOOD MEASURE.

BY CARLA KALOGERIDIS
Create a COVID-19 Microsite

Yes, there is a ton of information out there about COVID-19, and you might be tempted to think, “Why would our members need to hear more from us?” But remember, the No. 1 reason members join an association is for information they can’t get anywhere else. Don’t regurgitate information from a major news source that they have likely already seen, but do provide unique expert insights on the news and how it impacts the industry/profession you serve. A microsite is a perfect place to do that. Check out NAIOP’s COVID-19 microsite at www.naiop.org/covid19, American Staffing Association’s microsite at americanstaffing.net/covid-19, and Worldwide ERC’s site at www.worldwideerc.org/coronavirus.

Hit Pause Before You Hit Send

In your eagerness to communicate with members during these trying times, take a moment to read carefully everything you are sending out or publishing to be sure it has the right tone and is appropriate to the day. That may mean scrapping content you had already planned and focusing on how your industry is responding to COVID-19, what your association and other thought leaders see as the long-term impacts, and the lessons you have learned collectively.

Use This Time for Outreach

Now is a great time to demonstrate the value of your organization, says Kathryn Hamilton, VP of marketing and communications for NAIOP. She advises not to restrict your information to members only. “Track non-members who register for your programs or submit feedback, recognizing that they are good candidates for membership moving forward.”
Surprise and Delight with Personal Celebrity Messages

Would your members enjoy hearing encouraging words from someone famous right now? Cameo.com is packed with celebrities and public figures who will record a personalized video message for your virtual or in-person event. Ask comedian Colin Mochrie from *Who’s Line is it Anyway?* to make an important announcement, or Terry O’Quinn from *LOST* to congratulate your association on an anniversary milestone, or Olympic Gold Medalist Nadia Comaneci to offer words of encouragement during difficult times. Prices range from $30-$500, and many celebrities donate a portion of their fee to a worthy cause.

Be a Very Valuable Resource to Members — and Non-Members

American Staffing Association’s COVID-19 microsite features quick links to FAQs, Q&As, sample and downloadable documents, and other links. All COVID-19 resources are available to members and non-members. The site stays fresh by featuring a feed of COVID-19 news and updates pulled directly from ASA’s daily enewsletter, *Staffing Today*. Also, make sure your information is easy to find and accessible no matter where the user is on your site, advises Marlene Hendrickson, ASA’s senior director, publishing and marketing. “With about 20,000 visitors in just two weeks, our COVID-19 microsite surpassed ASA’s home page traffic in unique visitors,” she says.

Ask for Your Members’ Stories

Most people have a lot on their minds related to COVID-19; give your members a place to share or ask questions. User-friendly online forms help members submit with prompts like: What do you need information on? What are your thoughts on the current COVID-19 situation? What ideas or advice do you have to share with fellow members? What is your company doing to respond? Give them the opportunity to post with their name or anonymously. NAIOP’s COVID-19 online submission forms live on its COVDI-19 microsite and are called: In Your Own Words, Share Your Expertise, and Good Works.

Don’t Forget Your Chapters

Particularly during the pandemic, NAIOP is making chapter support a top priority. NAIOP staff meet weekly with chapter staff to discuss issues related to canceled events and challenges engaging members. NAIOP is offering its chapters fresh strategies for member communications, retaining sponsorship dollars, and providing member value when they can’t meet in person.
Develop Purposeful Partnerships

During the last week of March, ASA launched a new partnership with Retail Industry Leaders Association to help RILA members connect with ASA staffing agency members. The goal is to help RILA members find retail workers to fill open positions through a repurposed clone of ASA’s online member directory of staffing companies. This RILA page also is featured on the ASA home page. “ASA member staffing companies are now very interested in making sure their information in the ASA database is up-to-date,” notes Hendrickson. “The better the information from members, the more hits come up when RILA members search.” The association is providing its members with a way to get more business and place more talent, and ASA gets to engage with its members in a meaningful way during a time of uncertainty.

Work on Your Webinars

Everyone is jumping on the webinar bandwagon, and why not? It’s an easy way to offer members the latest information and tap into some potentially significant sponsorship dollars, says Carrie Hartin, MCI’s president, sales solutions and services. However, beware of webinar fatigue, she cautions. Understand what you have to do to keep a viewer’s attention, which includes high-energy speakers, a well-thought-out arc of information, and more slides than you think you need. Consider getting expert design help to add great visuals and animation to your webinars.

Give the Media What They Need

ASA’s COVID-19 site includes an official statement from the association’s CEO for media looking for quick quotes and access to ASA. The site also offers a simple way for visitors to share their email address to receive alerts and ASA Legal Line videos, which feature content from ASA attorneys. Similarly, Worldwide ERC features daily updates on global and domestic developments and legislative responses; content from its government affairs adviser, association government affairs committee chairs, and senior leadership team; and white papers that feature information reporters can use.

Start a COVID-19 Blog

Starting a blog is quick and relatively easy — and remember, blogs can serve a very specific purpose and don’t have to live forever. Check out NAIOP Market Share blog at blog.naiop.org, which contains coverage of NAIOP and industry-related COVID-19 content.
Put Significant Thought into Virtual Events

Many associations are rescheduling conferences and award nights into virtual events, but make sure you do it thoughtfully. You may not only need to switch your content delivery from live to virtual, but also you may need to change your conference content as well. In the first quarter of 2020, Worldwide ERC® had four Summits booked — three of which were scheduled to occur in the APAC region (Hong Kong, Shanghai and Singapore). After carefully assessing ongoing developments and recommendations from its local partners, the association quickly pivoted the session content to focus on the pandemic and switched the delivery to virtual channels. They also provided an opportunity for members to benchmark with one another on overall policy developments, challenges, solutions, and trends.

Create a More Connected Community

Worldwide ERC has conducted several member-pulse surveys, gauging and sharing information about how the coronavirus pandemic is impacting domestic and global moves in different regions, what types of assistance programs members are putting into place for different assignment types, and the prevalence of formal recovery plans. “We launched a dedicated group within our online member community specific to duty-of-care questions, advice, tips, and information sharing,” says Kristin White, senior content manager and editor, Worldwide ERC.

Work on that To-Do List

If you happen to be less busy than usual, now is the perfect time to tackle those projects that have been on your to-do list for far too long. Think magazine and newsletter redesigns, catching up online professional development, do a competitive analysis with your competitors including association and B2B publications, refresh your website, update your media kit, research what it takes to launch a book program, or re-energize your association social sites.

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