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FEBRUARY/MARCH 19

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Volume XXVI, Issue 1
There’s no reason anniversaries can’t be a great celebration — and a special opportunity for engagement and assessment.
BY TERESA BRINATI

It’s your association’s anniversary — now what? There can be plenty of pressure to organize a textbook campaign to celebrate your association’s history, enhance its visibility, and articulate a vision for the future. Go ahead, frost a cake and pop Champagne corks at your conference, but also consider putting a twist on tried-and-true festivities.

DOSE OF WHIMSY

When the Chicago-based Society of American Archivists (SAA) celebrated its 75th anniversary several years ago, it had neither the budget nor a sponsor for a commemorative book to be distributed gratis to its 6,200 members, so it hatched another idea: trading cards.

Similar in size and design as baseball cards with an image on the front and text on the back, SAA designed 75 numbered cards featuring prominent people, places, events, organizations, and ideas that played a major role in the profession’s history. Four additional unnumbered cards promoted association products — e.g., journal, books, education, and membership — and one card highlighted the vendor that sponsored production of the cards.

Ideas for content and images were submitted by members, then vetted and voted on by the anniversary task force. These historic cards were randomly pre-packaged in packs of 20 (but no chewing gum) and initially made available for sale — and trading — during the 75th annual meeting. A limited-edition tin emblazoned with the anniversary logo and ideal for stowing the trading cards was also minted. Packs were $6 each or two for $10.

Conference attendees had a blast with this activity and supported it by purchasing 1,100 packs — that’s 22,000 cards. It generated plenty of buzz onsite and on social media. The card packs and tins were also sold online after the conference.

In addition, SAA sponsored a Haiku contest and invited members to put their thoughts about the archives profession and what they do as archivists into this traditional Japanese poetry form — using five syllables, seven syllables, five syllables. More than 125
haiku were captured in a clever collection and displayed on posters at the conference and a freely downloadable PDF.

“You may be skeptical of these nontraditional ideas at first, but based on engagement by our members, there’s an undeniable currency in whimsical activities — and engagement means retention.”

NANCY BEAUMONT
Society of American Archivists

REINVENTING YOUR BRAND
When it comes to thinking imaginatively about anniversaries, associations can also seek inspiration from corporations, suggests Brooke Thornton, Carel Creative’s chief strategy officer. For instance, when Oreo had its 100th anniversary in 2012, the company used it as a chance to reinvent its iconic chocolate sandwich cookie by launching a series of digital cookies.

“The cookies did not exist, they were not in stores, and they were not being manufactured,” Thornton says. “They just put them out on social media and used these digital cookies to tackle current, relevant events.”

The first was a Gay Pride Oreo stuffed with layers representing the colors of the rainbow flag, Thornton says. A social media post talking about it was also issued and both got a lot of traction. Other digital Oreos commemorated NASA’s landing of the Mars rover and Discovery Channel’s popular program “Shark
Week.” While the company could not measure success on how many cookies it sold, it could measure how often people were talking about it on social media — and these virtual anniversary cookies proved appetizing.

“They kept reinventing the Oreo digitally as a way to talk about the heritage of the cookie,” Thornton says. “And they used where they came from to highlight where they were going, in this case as a cutting-edge brand in touch with culture.”

**ELEMENTS OF STYLE**

Branding is important no matter the institutional setting, whether corporate or nonprofit. Although your association may already have a brand or look, there is something specific that can make the anniversary stand out: turbo-charging your logo. It may seem obvious and not particularly out-of-the-box thinking to have an anniversary logo designed, but it’s a critical commemorative element.

“The logo is really the driver — the font, the color, the size can contribute to how compelling it is and how recognizable across platforms,” Carol Creative CEO Brisa Baron says. “Your audience will see it in your email, your website, your printed pieces, at the conference, and at your gala anniversary celebration.”

When TESOL International Association celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2016, it not only tailored its logo, it also incorporated a theme to its celebration — Reflecting Forward — which resonated with the more than 10,000 English language teaching professionals that belong to the association as well as its staff.

TESOL’s Reflecting Forward theme effectively and succinctly captured that concept and was manifested in its many celebratory activities, such as, a Founders’ Day recognizing outstanding TESOL professionals and presenting success stories from the field. “The anniversary is about people — people from the past and people now,” says Barry Pilson, former director of marketing and membership at TESOL. “This is a piece that gets lost very often.”

“The anniversary is a landmark for the organization and you don’t want it to just pass you by,” he continues. “You want to do something to mark the time and put a stake in the ground moving forward. It’s about taking stock of where you are and thinking about what you need to do to still be around in 25 years.”

Highlighting an association and industry’s growth over the years is a great way to show how members and staff have changed for the better. PMMI’s *Packaging World* magazine celebrated 25 years in January. In addition to several special anniversary projects, a series of articles will be published throughout the year showing how the industry has changed through the lens of what the magazine published over the years.

Matt Reynolds, editor of *Packaging World*, says the series will offer some fun “can you believe that’s the way it was?” moments, but also showcase how PMMI has and continues to grow and change. This includes numerous new features, products, and other improvements they will be making in coming years.

“Realistically, nothing lasts a quarter of a century without evolving,” Reynolds says. “We highlight some of the big benchmarks and inflexion points along the way over the first 25 years, and there are sure to be many more in the coming years.”

The series is also a great example of one way to use content your association already has.

**LEVERAGING EXISTING ASSETS**

Commemorative books may be an anniversary staple, but the occasion also presents an opportunity to re-conceive existing intellectual assets. Myrna Jacobs, TESOL’s director of publishing and product development, spearheaded production of a series of four publications that resulted from — but were not about — the 50th anniversary.

Authors were invited to reconsider historic articles on English language teaching research from *TESOL Journal*, *TESOL Quarterly*, *Essential Teacher*, and other TESOL Press publications, and to recast the material for modern use. It was another way to embody the theme of Reflecting Forward.

“We’re sitting on content from the last five decades and wondered what can we do that is meaningful?” Jacobs says. “This series allowed us to take a deeper look at TESOL’s accumulated body of knowledge.
Production of the series was absorbed into mainstream publishing activity. The publications contribute intellectually and generate revenue without screaming ‘this is from our 50th,’” Jacobs says.

Another core anniversary component with plenty of room for creativity is the timeline, whether it’s a microsite off the main website or an installation that can be moved around. “Over and over again, we see timelines as the strategy for how best to tell the story with brands as well as associations,” Thornton says. The key is to not limit the timeline to 2-D, 3-D, or even 4-D mediums.

One example she gave is New York’s Hot 97, the oldest and largest hip-hop radio station in the country, did an event with Harvard University’s Hiphop Archive & Research Institute around the anniversary of hip-hop. They put together a living museum exhibition that showcased a timeline of the creation of the genre in the early 1970s in the Bronx to where it is currently and how it now has a global reach.

“An installation can be used at an event, then brought in-house to the headquarters, so whether its consumer-facing or in the lobby, it can be used to inspire staff as well as members,” Thornton says.

Social media formats are ideal for disseminating historical nuggets, plus you can readily measure interaction with content. “The most creative thing about our celebration was using old photos and trivia on Twitter tagged #ThrowBackThursday in the weeks leading up to the annual meeting,” says Valerie Norville, editorial director of NASBE (National Association of State Boards of Education), which celebrated its 60th anniversary in 2018. “These photos also popped up on the screen during our annual meeting and at a presentation during the reception.”

Both TESOL and SAA posted interactive timelines on their respective anniversary microsites highlighting important developments since the founding of their organizations, with loads of input from component groups — sections, chapters, committees. It presented another opportunity to not only get more people involved, but also to help document different aspects of the association’s history.

And those two things are the keys to great anniversaries.

Whether it’s a silver, gold, or diamond jubilee — or something in between – anniversaries are an excellent time to remind members who you are, where you’ve been, what you’ve done, and where you’re going next. Because the only way to get from one milestone to the next is to make sure your members are along for the journey.

“The anniversary is a landmark for the organization, and you don’t want it to just pass you by. It’s about taking stock of where you are and thinking about what you need to do to still be around in 25 years.”

BARRY PILSON, former director of marketing and membership, TESOL International Association

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