

# Signature



*Desperate times call for associations to be nimble, resourceful, innovative and very, very fast.*

# BOOK MAP

In this issue of **Signature**  
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# More than Just

## 1s & 0s

USER EXPERIENCE IS CRUCIAL FOR ASSOCIATION WEBSITES. THE PANDEMIC HELPED SHOW WHO WAS DOING IT WELL AND WHO NEEDED TO SCRAMBLE.

BY JENNIFER SILBER

Whether you trace its inception to the early 1990s or to the academic networks of the '70s and '80s, there is no denying that the internet has changed *a little* over the years.

What hasn't changed is how important it is to communication.

For some associations, the slew of crises over the past year and a half drew into stark relief just how crucial websites are to achieving their goals and executing initiatives, especially when it comes to design and user experience.

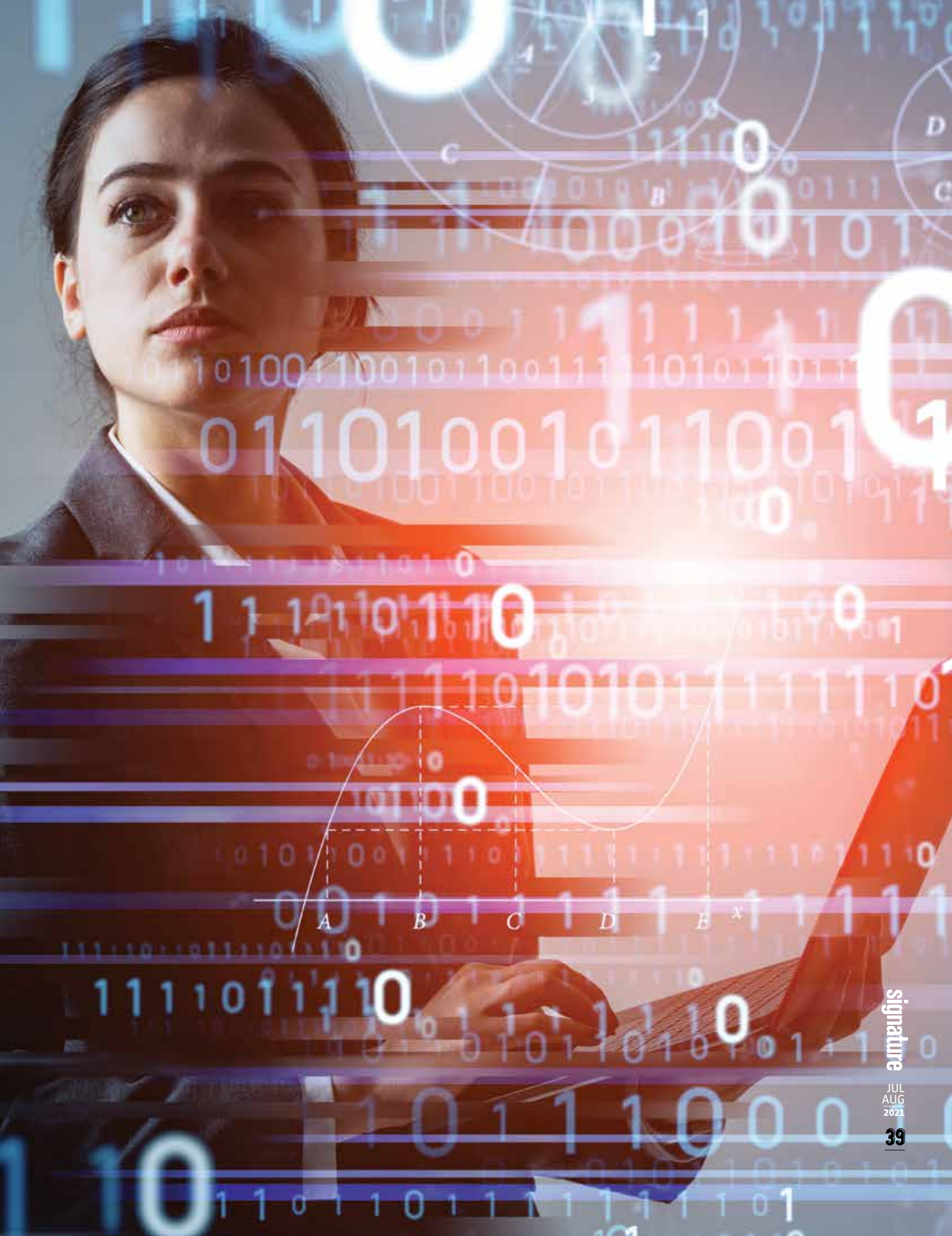
Due to the inherent interactive nature of websites, there is

perhaps no other medium where experience is more important. During the early days of the pandemic, many organizations (not just associations) realized they didn't have a good answer for a deceptively simple question: How are people using your website — your content — and how do they want to use it?

The increased push to digital during the past year or so showcased some of the many smart things associations were already doing with their websites, as well as some new tactics for creating the most engaging and effective web experience for members and potential members.

iStock.com/metamorworks







**Make It Personal**

In 2019, the American Staffing Association realized it had a problem. The ASA website contains tens of thousands of pages, and there was no easy way for members to find the content they needed when they needed it. On the back end, the process of creating new pages and correcting existing pages was cumbersome, and updates took a long time to publish.

With help from consultant Fabrizio + Friends, Nick Montgomery, manager of web content for ASA, dove into a true redesign of the site. To better wed form and function, they tackled the technical issues. Every piece of content received tags and was categorized according to a taxonomy that aligned with member interests. This aided a new, more robust internal search engine and a switch to WordPress — that made updates easier for ASA staff.

“The new features guide members to view content that is specific to them, and adding *myASA* made it easier for members to search and find content that’s relevant to their interests.”

**Nick Montgomery**, manager of web content

**American Staffing Association**, a trade association representing the U.S. staffing, recruiting, and workforce solutions industry and whose members operate approximately 15,000 staffing firm offices across the country.

<https://americanstaffing.net>

But the biggest advantage to the new site was that members could personalize their experience.

A *myASA* landing page lets users save pages to a personal library. “The new features guide members to view content that is specific to them, and adding *myASA* made it easier for members to search and find content that’s relevant to their interests,” Montgomery says. “New pages are created with category tags so that members can find what they are looking for just by using the search bar.”

Personalization was also a highlight of upgrades in the Sun City Hilton Head Community Association website. The site, which hosts general information pages, e-newsletters, and more, had

**American Staffing Association**



Members signing in to [americanstaffing.net](https://americanstaffing.net) have access to their own *myASA* workspace. There they can save content through a vertical menu. ASA recommends content based on their interest.





been redesigned in 2019 when the community changed management companies.

“The visuals on the site draw the user in,” says Jennifer Mathis, SCHHCA’s director of communications. She says the best part of their 2019 redesign was the creation of Resident Central, the new heart of the website’s experience. Not only does the page offer a array of personalized content, the community is familiar with the terminology “Resident Central,” which meant they felt immediate connection from seeing the content presented that way.

“The end result is a great site that is user-friendly and loved by the community and staff,” Mathis says.

Which is exactly the result the National Association of Home Builders was hoping



“We also made a unique template for the webpage and for the e-newsletters so that when residents saw the design, they knew it was related to how the community was handling operations due to COVID-19.”

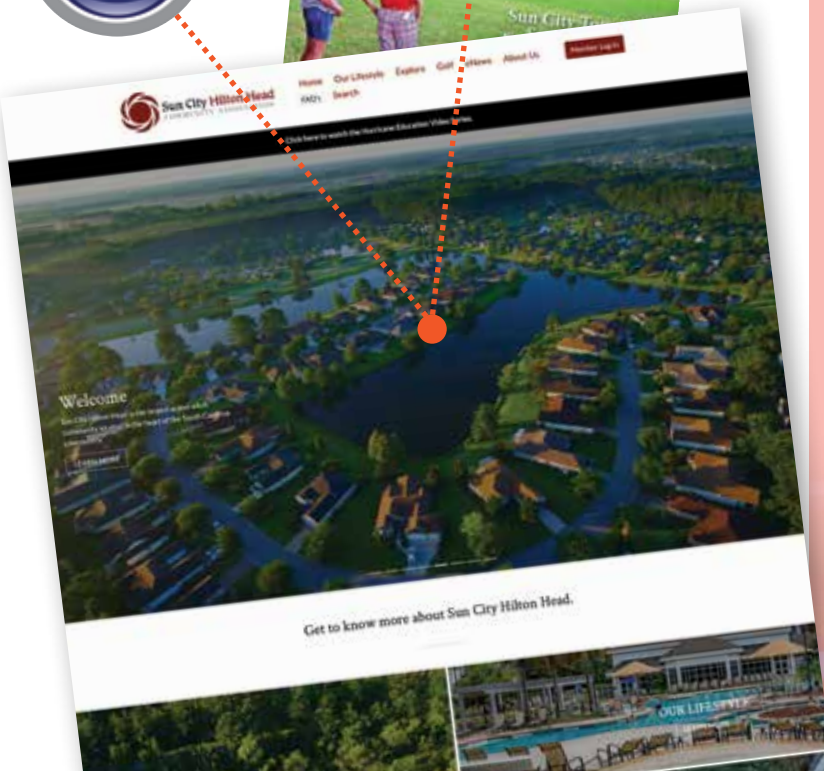
**Jennifer Mathis**, director of communications

**Sun City Hilton Head Community Association**, the community association for Sun City Hilton Head, an active adult community in South Carolina with a resident population of more than 8,600 households.

[www.suncityhiltonhead.org](http://www.suncityhiltonhead.org)

## Sun City Hilton Head Community Association

SCHHCA integrates its website with a video channel and its monthly magazine, *Sunsations*, that is both printed and online.



## Make Technology Work for You

**1 Track website performance.** Use a web analytics service to find out which pages your members are looking at, how they’re finding their way to those pages, and how long they’re staying on your site.

**+ Know where you stand:** Start with an evaluation of how much content your website has and how it’s organized.

**+ Know where you’re going:** Make note of how many unique visitors your site has at a specific moment as well as over time.

**2 Invest in technology.** Streamline the systems through which you publish content to your website. It will save on staff resources later, plus you’ll end up with a site that’s more responsive when unexpected changes are necessary.

**3 Manage the details.** Before launching a redesign, make a plan. Your development process might look similar to the steps followed by the Sun City Hilton Head Community Association.

**+ Collect the requirements:** List what content and features need to be included.

**+ Mock up the design:** Develop distinct alternatives that address form and function.

**+ Test the system:** The best website in the world doesn’t do much good if certain people or devices can’t access it.

**+ Plan to communicate with users:** Share your website features through advertising, training, and tutorials.

“Members were especially grateful for this improved functionality during the pandemic, when they needed to find information quickly to help respond to the rapidly changing situation”

**Anne Baker**, assistant vice president of industry communications

**National Association of Home Builders**, a federation of state and local home builders that represents a network of more than 140,000 professional craftsmen, innovators, and community builders.

[www.nahb.org](http://www.nahb.org)

for as it sought to address members’ needs by developing a mobile-friendly website. Their site also had nearly 10,000 pages of content to parse out, says Anne Baker, assistant vice president of industry communications for NAHB.

“We now customize sections throughout the site,” she says. “For example, we customize the news feeds from our blog based on the section — if a visitor is in the Community section, they’ll see membership news. If they are in the Advocacy section, the news feed will feature those types of stories.”

### Introduce Features that Function

Websites often serve the important role of information and content hubs for the entire association. Whether it’s potential members who want to see what you are about or members who are coming for

help, websites need to focus on the function of providing the content people need.

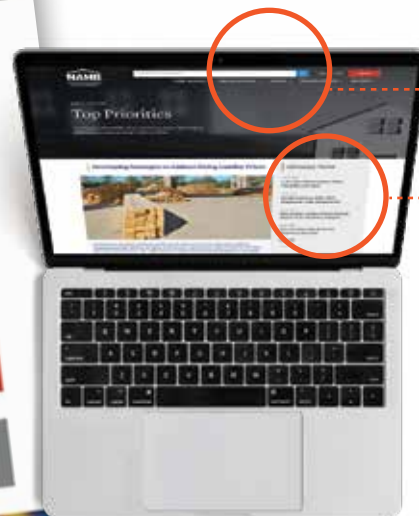
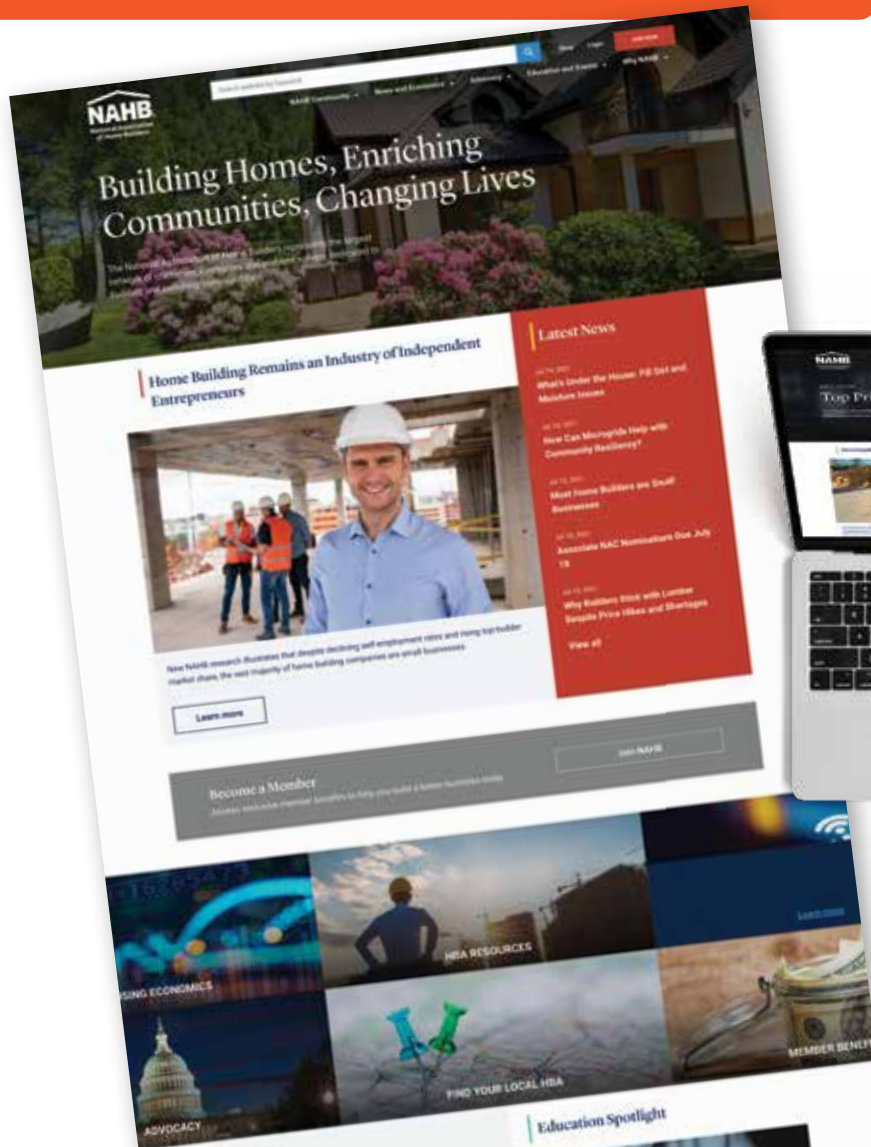
SCHCA does this by integrating some of its content channels to provide new access points for members. SCHCA’s monthly publication, *SunSations*, is published online as well as in print. The association purchased Publitas for online publishing so it could flow the newsletter into the new website. Additionally, SCHCA added four video channels as part of its official communication program during the pandemic.

Your association should always know what’s going on with its website — it’s almost impossible to decide what needs to be improved if you don’t know what’s already working. Associations have various tools available for checking on a website’s performance and identifying its strengths and weaknesses, from focus groups and user polls to web analytics and communication audits.

The only way to provide a productive experience for your members is to know what they need and how they need it.

When you know what your members are using, you can decide what needs to be added or improved. That may mean identifying underutilized resources that you want to let members know about, or it may mean developing additional resources to address unsatisfied needs.

## National Association of Home Builders



NAHB customizes its website so the news feed features related stories by section. The search function on the website connects with several other digital offerings.



For example, NAHB implemented a federated search that connected several of its other digital offerings, such as its news and economics blogs and the bookstore. “We had heard from members that it was difficult to find some content through the search function,” Baker says. “We now use a lot of imagery and videos to draw members in.”

### Timing Is Everything

NAHB launched its redesigned website in January 2020, just in time. “Members were especially grateful for this improved functionality during the pandemic, when they needed to find information quickly to help respond to the rapidly changing situation,” Baker says.

Likewise, SCHHCA’s redesign turned out to be exactly what they needed as the pandemic began.

SCHHCA was able to quickly build new pages and direct people there with improved visual wayfinding on the resident landing page. “The buttons clearly let our audience know ‘this is information you need to know because of the pandemic,’” Mathis says.

“We posted operational updates on the site and created a brand associated with COVID-19 called Our New Path Forward. We also made a unique template for the webpage and for the e-newsletters so that when residents saw the design, they knew it was related to how the community was handling operations due to COVID-19,” Mathis says.

When the pandemic hit, some associations found out little communication problems they had before were now very big problems. But associations don’t have to hope for lucky timing or wait for a crisis to break things.

In the cases we’ve looked at here, the associations were well situated to help their members because they were proactive in identifying a better way to serve and communicate.

By collecting data on an ongoing basis, associations can stay ahead of potential challenges and be ready to maneuver when situations require it. It comes down to knowing what resources you have, what your users are using, what members need, and what they have or need access to.

One of the greatest challenges lies in striking a balance between providing what members ask for and leading them to information they didn’t know they should look for. SCHHCA used a branding tactic in Our New Path Forward to share critical information with its members. NAHB’s dynamic site highlights content related to the page the user is reading.

For ASA, the site customization tools mean that user pages can be populated with information related to other content the user has already selected or

with information about new products or events the association wants to advertise to its members.

By keeping an eye on what users are using and what they’re asking you for, your association can create a website experience that works well for your organization and your members. **S**



**Jennifer Silber, CAE, is senior editor for the American Staffing Association.**



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