

Fresh Ink

2 Minutes

Insights from emerging leaders

THIS ISSUE'S QUESTION

How should associations make their values and their stances on social issues known?



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Associations often take stands on societal issues through their value statements, strategic plan, or public releases such as the many statements on anti-racism and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) these past two years. However, if an association doesn't follow up these statements with action, the words are meaningless as they metaphorically gather dust on a shelf.

Across all departments, staff should know what these association values and beliefs are and work to incorporate them into content and programming. As a freelance writer and editor, I often focus on magazine strategy. Regarding DEI, for example, magazine staff can emphasize DEI statements and values by incorporating diversity into the overall strategy. This could start with a content audit that analyzes the diversity of sources, writers, and images — with staff committing to improving diversity.

Diversity should not be only occasional articles focused on diversity, but articles that weave diverse thoughts and questions throughout. That is made easier when you use diverse sources and writers who can provide unique perspectives and highlight inequities and marginalized groups. If an association has released a DEI statement, then DEI should be a way of life throughout the organization, not a performative statement soon forgotten. People want the organizations they're associated with to take a stand on prominent social issues because a collective voice is much greater than their own individual voice — and that's how they can be part of a change for the greater good. Taking a stand on social issues is tricky but can be very rewarding — so long as you are authentic and the topic is organically related to your company's mission.

As always, actions speak louder than words. When an association's actions align with its social stance, and that social stance aligns with its members' values, it gives the company a true voice or personality that members can relate to. This, in turn, instills loyalty and trust from members. It's important that you get behind issues that your members agree with; this is the tricky part.

When preparing to speak up about an issue, I suggest first getting feedback from a small group of trusted members to try to figure out how your message will be received. If you can pair up a prominent social issue with a member benefit and promote that in social campaigns, that's the ultimate goal. You could be rewarded with boosted sales/membership and increased member loyalty. The key to representing your association's values and culture is consistency. It's great to launch a campaign or release a statement, but members and prospects want to see that an organization truly "walks the walk" on a daily basis.

Consistently posting on multiple social media channels is the best way to share your values and address social issues. Sprout Social found that 53% of people say they feel connected when a company's values align with their own. A multi-channel strategy will reach people of varying backgrounds and beliefs and unify them with a sense of community.

Social media is also the best outlet for showing behind-the-scenes content and humanizing an association. Showing real people actively representing their organization's values builds credibility. Combined with a sense of community, this credibility leads to trust. Associations that win the trust of their constituents will see a rise in engagement, event attendance, and of course, membership.

Send a quick note to Associate Editor Thomas Marcetti (thomas@kalomedia.com) if you'd like to weigh in on a future Fresh Ink question.