

# Are You Maximizing Your Membership?

by Arlene Farber Sirkin

**B**y researching the reasons your prospects fail to join, you can often identify specific actions necessary to increase your closure rate and membership. Closure rate equals the percentage of prospects who actually join after requesting information on your organization.

In a surprising number of cases, the reason a prospect does not join relates to “small stuff” associations could easily correct.

**1. Failure to respond immediately to the prospect.** When a prospect calls for information, most want it YESTERDAY, not one or two weeks or a few months from now, Prospect kits should be pre-made, even faxable.

These “hot prospects” should be THE top priority, and should be followed up immediately. One association with a small prospect pool, a large prospect kit, and high dues sends out information by U.S. Postal Service 2-day overnight. “We want them to get it when they are most interested and likely to join. \$3.20 for postage is a wise investment; it shows them we are very interested and responsive,” said one association manager.

**2. An overly complicated application process.** This can include too lengthy an application or extremely complicated dues formulas. This is a barrier associations should eliminate. One association solved the problem of a complicated dues structure by training the person who answers the phone to talk the prospect through the dues calculation. Ironically, even an association of financial services executives reports a complicated dues structure creating a barrier for prospects.

**3. Materials failing to focus on the benefits of membership.** Most

associations realize their materials need to focus on the benefits of membership (i.e., what’s in it for me – the prospect?). Many associations find they can convert prospects to members by redoing their materials to focus on what prospects and research tell them members want. This works best if the association is already providing benefits to members, not just adequately marketing the benefits of membership. Savvy associations know it is not enough to provide member benefits; you must tell the prospects and members what you are providing.

**4. No followup.** Some associations fail to maximize these “golden nuggets” – their prospects who request membership information.

Ideally, all prospects should be given a follow-up call within 30 days of getting prospect membership information. A prospect initiating a request for membership information should be treated as an “A+” prospect deserving T.L.C. (tender loving care). But even prospects sent unsolicited membership information because they have purchased a product or attended an annual conference should be contacted as soon as possible while (hopefully) your product’s value is still fresh in their minds.

Handled properly, such prospects can be converted into lifelong members. Is it worth 5-10 minutes of someone’s time (staff or volunteer) to help convert these most likely prospects into members? If you are not convinced, try a sample of prospects who get followed up against a sample who do not, then compare the percentage who join. For most associations, the follow-up calls pay off in new members.

*Arlene Farber Sirkin is co-author (with Michael P. McDermott) of Keeping Members: The Myths & Realities, published by the Foundation of the American Society of Association Executives, 1995.*