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Association Executives Agree: The Future of Associations is Mobile

When you hear the word “mobile,” you may think of technology, such as a cell phone, an iPad, or a GPS. Or you may think of “Mobile,” spelled with an uppercase “M”, a comprehensive label for the unique qualities of the world in which we live: It’s fast, it’s personal, it’s always on and everywhere, ‘round the clock and around the globe. Mobile is both of those things, but it’s also more than that - It signifies a quality of being mobile, being capable of changing, adapting, and responding to today’s environment.

Fusion Productions recently engaged with a community of association leaders to learn about the issues that are of greatest concern to them today. Through individual interviews, surveys, and focus groups, Fusion conducted deep discussions with leaders in the industry, including Velma Hart, CAE, CFO, AmVets National Headquarters, Paul Pomerantz, CAE, World-Wide Executive Director DIA, and Susan Sedory Holzer, MA, CAE, Chief Strategy Officer, AAO-HNS to name just a few.

Across the board, participants in the study agreed that mobile is a key environmental issue informing the way they deal with value, strategy, and structure as they face 2011. One survey respondent commented, “Mobile applications will revolutionize our relationships with our global contacts and potential customers.”

However important mobile with a lower case “m” may be, it is Mobile that so profoundly affects all points of association business.

For example, 68% of the survey respondents said it was “Extremely Important” to discover new ways to add value in an age of mobile 24x7 access and expectations. But as Fusion learned through focus groups, perhaps the longer phrase in that equation is about how to define that value in the first place.

Mark Langley, Executive Vice President and COO, PMI and member of the DigitalNow Advisory Group, says that PMI has experienced a shift in member segments that he calls “startling.” Member value today is not the same as it was then because member composition has evolved.

“The external and environmental influences that associations face today make it more difficult for us to truly understand what value means to them,” said Langley. “When associations attempt to be all things to all people, they run the risk of not offering distinctive value to those who are core to the mission.”

A whopping 83% of survey respondents said it was either “Extremely” or “Very” important to them to understand how to create innovation in products or services when obsolescence is measured in months, rather than years – a competency which requires a slew of related competencies, such as speed-to-decision and speed-to-adoption. In fact, one of the greatest appeals of mobile technology is its low barrier to entry. This is the same quality that presents such a challenge in implementing innovations as many association leaders operate in a more traditional and structured fashion.

Clarke Price, CAE, President and CEO of the Ohio Society of CPAs said, “The solutions offered by new technologies seem so unfamiliar and so non-traditional that leaders can be very resistant to accepting them, which can impede an association’s ability to take advantage of those opportunities.”

Other highlights of the survey:

- 76% said it was Extremely Important to them to learn how to engage members emotionally and create a sense of belonging.
- 94% said it was either Extremely or Very Important to them to assess how to evolve new business models, not just those based on dues/non-dues revenue
- 65% said it was Extremely Important to them to create, develop, and sustain relevant, trusted content in a 24x7 world
- 68% said it was Extremely Important for them to communicate effectively with the next generation of members/stakeholders/workforce - and identify what new competencies will be required

Fusion Productions sponsors this comprehensive association leadership research project each year to inform the content design of the DigitalNow executive summit, which the company produces in collaboration with Disney Institute.

According to Hugh K. Lee, Fusion President and co-owner of DigitalNow: “Associations should be acting with greater urgency... get the right people on staff to enable us to go deep, to discard our preconceived notions about our value and why we exist. We must define the ways in which we can compete with smaller outside organizations that are nibbling on our long tail, chipping away at our attendance, our sponsorship, education, and traditional lines of revenue.”

About DigitalNow

DigitalNow, a summit exclusively for association leaders, is co-produced by Fusion Productions and the Disney Institute. Now in its 11th year, DigitalNow 2011 will present cutting-edge speakers, groundbreaking ideas, tools, and data to inform the crucial decisions association leaders will need to make as they lead through the mobile maze and into that moving target we know as the future. For a full list of DigitalNow Advisory Group members, visit

<http://www.fusionproductions.com/digitalnow/about/advisory.cfm>

DigitalNow is being held April 6 – 9, 2011 at Disney's Grand Floridian Resort & Spa, at Walt Disney World, Lake Buena Vista, Florida. For more information, visit the official web site at

<http://www.digitalnowconference.com>

About Fusion Productions

Fusion Productions accelerates its clients' business goals through the integration of business strategy, web site and application development, e-learning, virtual reality and face-to-face meetings. Fusion has been in business for 35 years, and has a rich and deep relationship with the association community. To find out more about Fusion Productions, visit www.fusionproductions.com.

About Disney Institute

A leader in the world of professional development and training, Disney Institute specializes in programming that educates and inspires. Program participants go behind the scenes of the Walt Disney World Resort to meet with Disney leaders and to discover proven Disney business strategies that are easily adaptable to other organizations. The Disney Institute roster of program participants represents a "Who's Who" of Fortune 1,000 companies and international organizations. For more information about the Disney Institute, visit www.disneymeetings.com.

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