

Social Networking in Professional Associations

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What does AssociCom mean by "Social Networks for Professional Associations"?

- First, note that we are referring to "professional networks" - that is, communication and collaboration around professional activities. Although the tools borrow the term "social" from the original use of web 2.0 tools, these are not networks for "social" activities. They are networks for professional collaboration and learning.
- AssociCom creates private networks for the association members and the association executive/staff.
- These networks are restricted to members - they are not visible outside the association unless configured otherwise by the association.
- AssociCom has features to allow members to discover each other, communicate, collaborate and learn from one another. There is the ability to establish groups of common interest, create a library of documents and links, ask questions of the membership, and poll members. Configurable and browsable directories of library documents, groups and members are available.

The Potential Value of Social Networking in Professional Associations

- One of the primary values of a Professional Association is that it brings the members together to connect, collaborate and learn from one another. Social networking – tailored to these goals, greatly facilitates these connections.
- The professional Association is in a unique position to offer the benefits of a strongly connected network to its members. No general purpose network has the contacts and mandate to do so.

- Professional networking within the association is an effective way of more quickly integrating new members into the association.
- The association staff and executive can benefit from greater knowledge of their members *if* they implement an internal, association-led social network such as provided by AssociCom. By doing so, they have the ability to be an integral part of their members' network – reading and responding to their comments, providing information, conducting polls, and performing network analysis to gain insights not otherwise possible. Many of these things are not possible if the members are using an ad-hoc network, formed by themselves, without the involvement of the association.
- Professional Associations work hard to bring value to their members. Networking within the association could be a very cost effective and very visible value provided to the members.
- As members join other ad-hoc networks such as Linked-In and Facebook (which they are doing now, see below), it could become progressively more difficult to bring the members to an association-based social network. If the Professional Association is not the center of its members' networking experience it loses the ability to benefit from the member insights, communication and connections that social networking can bring them.

What is Happening Now?

- A large and growing number of professional adults are already using social networking sites like Linked-in and Facebook. Social networking is growing incredibly quickly and surprisingly, most of the users are adults who have finished college. Students are now the minority of users:
 - LinkedIn has 40 million professionals as members from over 170 industries – including executives from all fortune 500 companies. Membership is accelerating.
 - Facebook has over 200 million users, with 100 million log-ins each day. More than 2/3 of their users are outside of college, and the fastest growing segment of users is 35 and older.
- In general, this means that members of professional associations are aware of, soon will be using, or are already using social networking. The question is, should your association be at the center of your member's professional network? The answer depends on the needs and goals of your association.