

# Predictions for associations in 2017

As an association executive, I keep myself updated on association governance and management trends by subscribing to several online newsletters, which I find useful and relevant to my job. Recently, I downloaded a file on “Top Association Management Predictions in 2017,” made by 13 association experts and put together by Jen Barrell, director of Content, Branding & Buzz at Aptify, a technology-solutions company, for associations. While these predictions are US-centric, I thought I’d share some with you, which may apply in our context.

On adapting to the many changes happening today and, in particular, on demographic shifts, Sarah Sladek, founder of XYZ University, says associations are expected to help their members successfully manage and navigate these changes, such as in finding and keeping talent and in preparing young professionals for leadership roles.

In 2017 Amith Nagarajan, chairman and CEO of Aptify, says the pressure on association executives to adopt new business models will increase. As a response, they need to be willing to experiment with new ideas rapidly. Associations will be looking at ways to engage a broader audience than just their traditional membership. There’s an opportunity to create relationships with those who may never convert into membership, but would find value in the content and dialogue the association is uniquely able to provide.

Associations will need to focus on developing their three most valuable assets: data, staff and partnerships, says Deirdre Reid, a freelance and content marketing writer specializing in the association market. Associations have to get better at using data to learn more about their members and deliver more value to them. They’ll stay competitive by investing in their staff’s personal and professional growth, and partner with others in their community who can help them achieve their mission.

Tony Rossell, senior vice president at Marketing General Inc., predicts that in 2017, membership will continue to be the glue that enhances networking, information distribution and sales for associations. As they have so much content to share and have very defined audiences, adding online inbound marketing would be an ideal channel for associations. To build worldwide awareness and demonstrate

relevance, associations have to rapidly adopt this channel as part of their existing marketing mix.

On member engagement, Elizabeth Weaver Engel, CEO and chief strategist at Spark Consulting LLC., sees that associations will move away from a simplistic use of data to segment and target members and other audiences based on very broad and often inaccurate categories. They will begin treating them as real people with whom they have real relationships. This means associations need to get to know members as individuals; seek to understand their most important goals and most pressing problems; and provide solutions that make associations vital partners in their personal and professional success.

For Jeff de Cagna, chief strategist and founder of Principled Innovation LLC., association decision-makers should declare 2017 as “The Year of Foresight”, the year in which they will commit themselves to the critical work of learning with and preparing both their stakeholders and their organizations for whatever the future might hold.