

Membership Retention: Winning at the Membership Engagement Game

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Membership retention is something we all discuss, measure, plan for, and worry about. As a chamber that experienced 51% growth in one year for new memberships, we focus on what we can do to retain each and every member we have. Yes, our chamber has a dedicated person focused on retention, but we realize that retention is everyone's responsibility. If a program does not deliver on what we promised, a member may not see a need to renew. If bad customer service is delivered at an event, a member may not renew. If a controversial position is taken on an issue, a member may not renew. Each member of our chamber's team plays a role in making sure that members understand and realize the value of membership.

Here are a few key considerations:

1. Are you offering the best products, programs, and services to help your businesses realize the value proposition that your chamber offers? Once a year you should be evaluating everything you offer to members and make sure that it still aligns with the members' needs, as well as the mission of the organization. (Ex. We eliminated the 4th of July Parade. It was a great community event, but did not fit our mission and took extensive volunteer time. We gifted it to the Lion's Club.)
2. The onboarding process for members is key, and must be executed in a thoughtful manner. Too much information at once is overwhelming. Our approach is to provide several avenues for members to learn about the offerings of the chamber. Our member orientation, Maximize Your Membership, is open to individuals at all stages of membership – first week, first year, or ten years after they joined. This has helped to educate existing members on new opportunities and programs. We also do a series of onboarding emails that feature video messages from key staff and leadership. Sent out during the first three months after a member joins, each email features action items for the member to follow up on in order to utilize their membership.
3. We have an extensive 21-point retention plan for first-year members that starts the day they join and involves all staff and leadership. Although we believe in heavily investing resources and efforts into first year members, we also need to find ways to connect on a regular basis with existing members. This will be a focus in our next strategic plan. The value a member receives from the chamber must evolve as their business evolves. What is helpful during their first-year in business may not be as helpful after they have an established clientele and experienced sustainable growth.
4. Ask your members for input...on everything. And then put the feedback to work in your retention efforts. Surveys following events are great, but we also like to ask more mission-focused questions in an annual survey. And the most important question we can ask is, "Was your business more successful due to your membership and involvement with our chamber?" Allow your members to be critical, but then also make sure you follow up to find out what they suggest you do differently to increase the value they receive. Small changes can have a huge impact.
5. Realize that you cannot be everything to everyone. Focus on what you can offer your members that no other organization can offer and then master it! We all have limited resources so you will have to choose what to take on based on what will make the biggest difference to the membership you serve.

As you can see, I tend to look at membership retention a little differently and focus on the overall approach to creating value for our members. Our value proposition is unique and member-centric. And it is ever-evolving. Work smart to remain relevant to your members and the communities you serve. Best of luck!