

How Are You Doing? And How Are WE Doing?

*Our Member Survey Uncovers
the Latest Partnering Trends,
as Well as Key Findings
on How ASAP Can Best
Help You Respond*

By Jon Lavietes



As 2020 mercifully came to an end and we turned the page with hope and not a little trepidation to 2021, we thought we'd take a good look at the results of a survey ASAP recently sent to its members to gauge where we are as a profession and as an association: What are the most prevalent trends in alliance management today? What challenges are alliance professionals facing? And how is ASAP doing in helping its community respond to those challenges and in supporting members' needs?

In short, we wanted to know: How are you doing? And how are *we* doing? The answers were illuminating, to say the least, and we wanted to share them with you here and let you know how we're responding to your needs and concerns.

Alliance Management Today: Complex, Virtual, and Strategic

You probably won't be shocked to learn that the intricacies of the alliance management role are getting more complex as partnering professionals across industries execute increasingly strategic initiatives in a pandemic-constrained virtual work world nearly devoid of in-person interaction. As has been stated elsewhere, since the onset of COVID-19, some things have changed, some have stayed the same, and some trends have simply accelerated. The result? More partnering, more activities to keep up with, and greater complexity.

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On the more strategic nature of alliance activities being performed, 38 percent of ASAP members noted that "there is more development of joint products/solutions with partners," while 35 percent reported that they are now "managing and orchestrating more multipartner alliances or ecosystems" in order to create these offerings. The only current trend to score higher in the survey? The rest of the organization recognizes the work alliance managers are doing; 39 percent said "there is more internal support for/understanding of the strategic alliance function in our organization," largely because they "have been able to proactively demonstrate the value of the alliance management function" (37 percent).

Doing More with Less: Portfolios Are Expanding, but Resources Aren't

Of course, a job wouldn't be a job if it didn't come with challenges, and COVID-19 has brought plenty of them. Most notably, many of you are being asked to do more with less, presumably due in part to pandemic-related budget cuts—36 percent of survey respondents said that "portfolios are expanding but alliance management resources are not growing." Indeed, more than one-third of those surveyed manage 10 or more alliances, and 11 percent are responsible for 20 or more.

So while alliance managers may finally be getting the respect they deserve for orchestrating key company activities with more and more partners—at least in some quarters—this progress could be threatened if their employers underresource alliance management operations and spread them too thin.

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"Our members' and our profession's success depends on our ability to think strategically and be proactive in using partner portfolios to anticipate and get ahead of market trends," said ASAP president and CEO **Michael Leonetti**, CSAP. "It is hard for anyone to take a step back and see the big picture when they are simply inundated with day-to-day management responsibilities."



How Are We Helping?

ASAP, of course, exists to help its members fight this battle on many fronts by providing additional resources to help offset shrinking budgets and by connecting them with the people and tools that can foster new ideas: on how to utilize collaborations to unleash innovation, for example, as well as increase revenues, reduce risk, and drive other favorable outcomes. Members have apparently found the organization to be an indispensable ally in this regard, as more than 80 percent said it is likely (40 percent) or very likely (45 percent) that they will renew their membership in the coming year. A similar number of members said they would likely (43 percent) or very likely (44 percent) recommend ASAP to their colleagues. Employers are also recognizing ASAP's value—two-thirds indicated that their organization encourages ASAP membership or professional certification.

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At the risk of blaring a fanfare on our editorial horn, we can safely admit to some gratification that more members overall (61 percent) see *Strategic Alliance Quarterly*, ASAP's flagship magazine, as one of the association's most valuable editorial resources. The runner-up print benefit, the *ASAP Handbook of Alliance Management: A Practitioner's Guide*, and its companion biopharma and IT supplements, are still of great importance to members at all stages of their careers—more than half

of the overall membership see them as trusty companions in doing their jobs. Among more seasoned alliance professionals, 8 percent more members valued the magazine than the *Handbook*—64 percent of people who have served in alliance management capacities for six or more years and 61 percent who have been in such a role for three to five years rated *Strategic Alliance Quarterly* as one of ASAP's top pieces of published written content. The magazine and the *Handbook* are of equal importance to more junior practitioners who have been at this for two years or less (60 percent).

Similarly, the ASAP Global Alliance Summit was singled out by more than half of respondents (55 percent) as the association's top professional development offering, the highest of any program or service. Members also rated the ASAP Netcast webinar series (42 percent) and ASAP's certification program (39 percent) very highly as prized benefits of membership.

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Same Value Proposition, Different Career Phases

Interestingly, ASAP's value proposition flexes somewhat to meet the demands of alliance professionals as they progress through their careers.

Members starting out in the profession are naturally focused on finding educational resources to help them learn to do their jobs. Those with zero to two years of experience rank webinars (50 percent), the Summit (49 percent), and certifications (47 percent) as ASAP's top programs. Professionals with three to five years under their belts prioritize the same benefits but in different order—the Summit (47 percent), certifications (46 percent), and webinars (42 percent) take win, place, and show, respectively. Spend six or more years in the business and the community and networking opportunities become top-of-mind; the BioPharma Conference (52 percent), the Summit (46 percent), and ASAP's chapter and regional events (39 percent) represent the top three professional development assets among this group, with roundtables and other networking events coming in fourth (30 percent).

Real Value, Virtually Delivered (for Now)

Notwithstanding these many positive findings, we're keenly aware that there's always room for improvement. Just as you



face challenges in your job and within your organization, ASAP is continually seeking ways to address member feedback and better assist you in responding to these challenges and partnering trends. In other words, we're listening—and we're constantly on the lookout for ways that ASAP can provide even greater value.

The coronavirus pandemic has of course given all of us lessons in Zoom fatigue—"You're on mute," "Did you send the link?"—and other aspects of our "new normal" virtual reality. It has also put limits and constraints on our virtual event programming, something several of you noted, even if ASAP isn't facing this challenge alone.

Although nine out of every 10 respondents said that they would continue to attend virtual programming necessitated by the pandemic, many made it clear in accompanying comments that they expect and devoutly hope to revert to face-to-face meetings as soon as this global public health crisis is resolved. Difficulties in blocking out time for multiday virtual events and preventing day-to-day work responsibilities from distracting from remote conference activities are just some of the challenges members encountered in 2020.

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Most of all, we've long known that in-person networking is precious to ASAP members. And while ASAP's conferences and events are still virtual for the time being, we've added more Coffee Cafés and virtual hallway conversations and roundtables, and adjusted these hallmark events to feature more dedicated networking time, until live events are once again possible (hopefully soon!).

Leading the Charge While Following Your Lead

Of course, online access to ASAP's resources, information, and other content is vital at any time, pandemic or otherwise. Some members acknowledged that the association's website layout can feel like a labyrinth when retrieving content or locating useful information, which is why a redesign of the site and the all-important Member Resource Library will be a top priority in 2021. In time, ASAP hopes members will be able to more easily find and enjoy other insight-rich member offerings, such as its webinar archives, educational white papers, and editorial blog.

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Meanwhile, everyone at ASAP is still working hard to respond to your needs and challenges through our programming and publications, and we'll continue to do that through the pandemic and beyond. We know that, like the work of managing alliances and partnerships, this is an important job.

"Companies are counting on the alliance practice to play a major role in neutralizing the coronavirus and extricating society from the circumstances it has wrought, which means we as an association have to put our members in the best position to succeed," said Leonetti. "Sometimes leaders are the best followers, and by listening to and addressing our members' concerns, ASAP and its member community, like the rest of society, will emerge from this pandemic stronger than ever before."

Alliance portfolios are clearly growing in number, importance, and stature within companies. ASAP's wealth of knowledge and resources have gotten alliance managers to this point and will keep them moving forward on their journey to success in 2021. ■



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ASAP continues to do a great job of shaping and promoting alliance management as an essential corporate function in today's world; there is enormous value to be gained as a member. As a practitioner of collaboration in a variety of perhaps non-traditional alliance functions myself, I've found so many key elements of partnering and collaboration management for synergistic outcomes were perfectly encapsulated by ASAP's offerings.

— Kevin Little, CSAP
Senior Partnership Director
Novo Nordisk

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