



ASSOCIATION GUIDE:

# Supercharge Your Magazine

TO DELIGHT MEMBERS

**"Print  
is dead."** *→ NOT*

There's a scene in the 1984 movie *Ghostbusters* where Annie Potts' character, Janine, asks Egon (played by Harold Ramis) if he reads a lot, to which he snaps back, "Print is dead."

Since the invention of the telegraph, experts have been ringing the death knell for print communication. Yet, despite the rise of digital media, print continues to be an important source of information and entertainment.

In fact, according to the [News/Media Alliance](#), magazine readership is holding firm, with 88% of adults reporting they read a magazine in the last six months. Additionally, 67% say that even in this digital age, they love the touch and feel of a printed magazine.

Your association members are no different. Members consistently rank their association's magazine among the most valuable member benefits.

**How do you make your association magazine everything it could (and should!) be? Start with this guide. In it, you'll learn:**

- The benefits of putting time and effort into creating a high-quality publication.
- How to tell if it's time for a redesign (*hint: It probably is*).
- Tangible tips to transform your magazine into a valuable asset your members will love.

But wait, there's more! We'll also give you the lowdown on the types of content and design that resonate most with association mag readers and offer tips for decreasing costs and increasing revenue from your magazine.

**READY?  
LET'S GO!**

# The Benefits of a Well-Crafted Member Magazine

In July 2022, Marketing General Incorporated released its annual **Membership Marketing Benchmark Report**. Amid inflation concerns and pandemic-related membership losses, the report found a disconnect between how associations perceive their value and how they communicate that value to members.



## BENEFIT 1

### ENHANCE MEMBER SATISFACTION. ✍

Your association's magazine is one of the primary ways members connect with you. Each month or quarter, they get a reminder in the mail of the value you add to their lives. And considering **43% of associations** name lack of engagement as the top reason for membership attrition, having a regular point of contact is key.

Not only do members love your magazine, but readers also report **more trust** in news and information they get from a print magazine than other channels. **Psychologically speaking**, reading paper magazines fosters a profound connection with the content and elicits strong emotional responses due to its heightened sensory involvement.

Providing relevant, informative, engaging content will keep your members informed and connected to your association and industry.

"ONE OF THE TOP REASONS THAT PEOPLE ARE NOT RENEWING IS PERCEIVED LACK OF VALUE,"

- Jana Darling

MGI VICE PRESIDENT OF ACCOUNT SERVICES

A well-crafted member magazine helps communicate value to new and existing members. The magazine itself is also a valuable tool for fostering a sense of connection within your organization. Your magazine can:

- Enhance member engagement and satisfaction
- Reinforce the association's brand image
- Generate non-dues revenue



## BENEFIT 2

# REINFORCE YOUR BRAND

A HIGH-QUALITY MEMBERSHIP PUBLICATION CAN REINFORCE YOUR OVERALL BRAND MESSAGING BY:

### ESTABLISHING [CREDIBILITY]

A well-crafted magazine demonstrates your association's expertise and helps establish authority within your industry. The News/Media Alliance found readers view magazines as more inspiring, fulfilling and trustworthy than websites or ad-supported TV networks.

### SHOWCASING YOUR VALUES AND MISSION

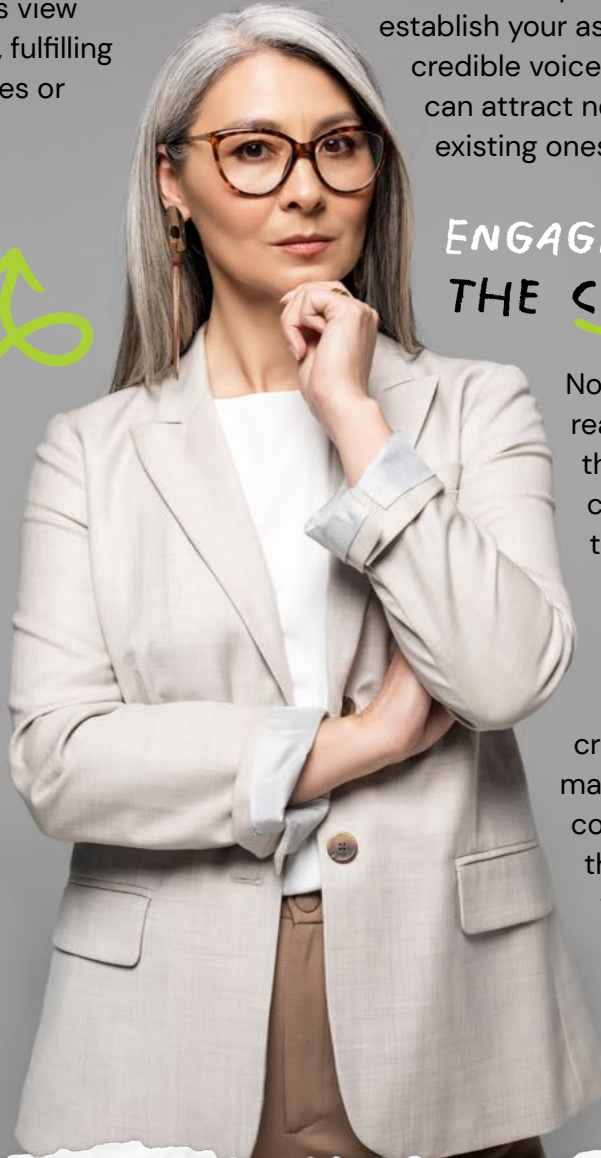
Your magazine is an excellent platform for highlighting who and what makes your organization special. When you feature member achievements, share success stories or highlight association initiatives, you demonstrate your commitment to growth and development within your industry.

### PROVIDING A PLATFORM FOR THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

Thought leadership in the form of in-depth research and expert opinion pieces helps establish your association's reputation as a credible voice within the industry, which can attract new members and engage existing ones.

### ENGAGING WITH THE COMMUNITY

Not only do members enjoy reading your magazine, they like being part of the conversation. Ask members to share their experiences in the publication, and discuss the magazine's content on social media. Involving members in creating and promoting your magazine builds a sense of community and belonging that further reinforces your brand.



### BENEFIT 3

## GENERATE NON-DUES REVENUE

Too many associations view their magazine as a cost burden to bear rather than a potential revenue generator. On the contrary, your magazine can potentially be a revenue generator.

Magazine ads are powerful, and advertisers know it. According to the News/Media Alliance, 76% of magazine readers take action based on seeing an ad in a print publication — making magazines more likely to lead to sales than ads in other forms of media.

**76% of  
magazine  
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[print publication.]**

High-quality publications bring in advertisers and sponsors looking for a captive audience. And don't stop with just selling a rectangle of ad space. Sponsored issues, ride-along ads, belly bands and branded content can increase engagement and visibility for advertisers while driving non-dues revenue for your association.





# Create a Magazine Your Members Will Love

## EVALUATE YOUR CURRENT MAGAZINE

Let's start by taking a good, hard look at your current publication. Here are three steps to help you objectively assess your magazine's strengths and weaknesses.

1. **Start with a self-assessment.** Sit down by yourself or gather a small group of association leadership and page through a few back issues of your magazine. What do you love about it? How does it make you feel? Reading a magazine is a tactical experience. Does the paper feel solid or flimsy? Does the design invite you to lean back and enjoy? Would you be proud to hand it off to a colleague or friend?

UNDERSTANDING THE  
VALUE OF A HIGH-QUALITY  
MEMBER MAGAZINE IS  
ONLY STEP ONE. NEXT, YOU  
HAVE TO CREATE IT.

2. **Ask your members.** Your members can offer valuable insights into what is and is not working in your publication. Conduct a survey or focus group and ask questions like:
  - Do you look forward to getting the magazine in the mail every month?
  - Do you typically read the magazine?
  - Which sections (if any) do you skip?
  - What types of content would you like to see more of in each issue?

3. **Track member engagement.** In addition to asking members what they like and dislike about your magazine, you can get a sense of how they use it by tracking engagement. If your magazine is available online, you can track how often content is viewed or shared on social media. Collect feedback through surveys, letters to the editor and content requests to understand member preferences. You can also ask about the magazine's pass-along rate (how often members share the publication with others).



# Create a Content Strategy

## UNDERSTAND YOUR MEMBERS' NEEDS AND PREFERENCES

Use knowledge from member surveys, focus groups and conversations with members to understand what they value most. This will help you craft a publication that speaks to the hearts and minds of your membership.

## PARTNER WITH A CREATIVE TEAM

Often content creation falls to whoever on your communications team has time that month. And while you may have great communicators on your staff, developing and writing engaging, relevant content with a long shelf-life issue after issue is a skill. To produce a truly value-rich publication, find contributors who are knowledgeable, passionate and articulate about your industry. Ensure they have a unique perspective to share with your audience and can interview thought leaders and convey expertise in a relatable way.

## DEVELOP A DIVERSE CONTENT MIX

Whether you publish monthly, quarterly or biannually, creating fresh content issue after issue is a significant challenge for many associations. Your editorial calendar should reflect a diverse content mix that caters to different member preferences and interests. It should combine long-form features, bite-sized upfront pieces, membership updates and news items. Don't forget to incorporate curated and edited member-generated content as well.

## BE [CONSISTENT]

Typos, errors and inconsistencies are surefire ways to disengage your readers, turn away advertisers and tank your magazine's real and perceived value. Make editorial quality and consistency a priority by developing an editorial style guide, investing in professional editing and encouraging contributors to stick to best practices. A clean, polished publication keeps members and advertisers engaged and reinforces your brand as a conscientious, credible organization.



## 5 SIGNS IT'S TIME TO REDESIGN YOUR MAGAZINE

1. **You're not inspired when you look at it.** If you're not excited to open and read your magazine, your members won't be either.
2. **The magazine has gotten messy.** Over time, it's easy to start breaking the rules by ditching departments or adding new fonts. If the pages of your magazine no longer look cohesive, or it's hard to find information, it's time for a refresh.
3. **It no longer matches your current branding.** If you've revamped your mission statement, logo or internal communications but not your member magazine, it's time.
4. **You're losing readers (and advertisers).** Members don't want to spend time with a publication that's not a pleasure to read. And advertisers don't want to be where readers aren't.
5. **Members tell you it's time to redesign.** If the bulk of your member feedback is that the magazine is poorly designed or hard to navigate, take heed and launch a redesign.

## Design With Intention

Canadian communication theorist Marshall McLuhan famously said, "The medium is the message." Basically, he's saying that the way information is communicated is as important (if not more so) than the message itself. McLuhan's idea emphasizes that the medium through which we receive information significantly impacts how we understand and interpret it.

*"The medium is  
the message."*



Your magazine's design can shape how the audience perceives and engages with your content. Design — in the form of colors, typography, layout, photos, etc. — serves as a guide for readers as they navigate through the magazine. In short, good design enhances the reader's experience, while bad design distracts and detracts from it.





# What Members Want

Asking your members directly what they want is the best way to understand their specific goals, values and preferences. Beyond direct surveys and focus groups, there are guidelines for association content that tends to resonate with members. Here are a few to consider:

## INDUSTRY **INSIGHTS** AND **TRENDS**

Members come to you (and, by extension, your magazine) looking for expertise in your industry. Highlight trends, innovations and the latest developments in your field through news bites, infographics and thought leadership pieces.

## **PRACTICAL ADVICE** AND **[RESOURCES]**

There's a reason listicles and top 10 lists are popular. People like to see advice presented in a way that is easy to digest. Offer your readers expert advice from industry experts and how-to guides that provide actionable tips they can apply to their personal and professional lives.

## **NETWORKING AND** **DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

According to Marketing General, networking with others in the field is the top reason members join your organization. Use your publication to highlight upcoming events, webinars, conferences and training. You can also feature Q&As with speakers and conference roundups or those who couldn't attend.

## **MEMBER SPOTLIGHTS** AND **SUCCESS STORIES**

Featuring real members in your magazine is a great way to celebrate successes throughout your organization and engage your membership. Try profiles, Q&As and first-person, member-generated essays.

## **ASSOCIATION AND** **NEWS UPDATES**

Your magazine is a valuable tool for keeping members informed about new initiatives, benefits or changes to policies or procedures. For important content like election announcements or organizational changes, consider an insert or dedicated special section that is sure to grab attention.

## **ADVOCACY AND** **POLICY UPDATES**

Cover relevant legislative or regulatory changes that may impact your members. Break down complicated political topics in easy-to-understand ways, and highlight what the association is doing to advocate for your membership.



# Quality and Cost: A Balancing Act

Yes, creating a high-quality publication requires investment. But, it's one that can pay dividends not only in member engagement and satisfaction but also in non-dues revenue via ad sales and member retention.

## EXPLORE ADVERTISING AND SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

According to the News/Media Alliance, three out of four magazine readers who see an ad take action. That's a powerful statistic to know. Your audience has great value to advertisers, and your magazine is an opportunity to introduce readers to helpful products or services related to your industry.

By attracting relevant advertisers and sponsors, you can generate additional income to support your magazine's production costs and even generate non-dues revenue for your association.

As you venture into a magazine redesign, focus on creating a sustainable model that supports continuous quality improvement without compromising the bottom line.

## IMPLEMENTING COST-EFFECTIVE [STRATEGIES]

In addition to offsetting costs with ad revenue, there are plenty of ways to streamline magazine production costs to save money upfront without sacrificing quality. One of the best ways to save is to partner with a full-service publisher that specializes in association magazines.

A good publisher comes with a wealth of expertise, tailored strategies and best practices that come together to create a top-quality, revenue-generating publication while saving you time and money.





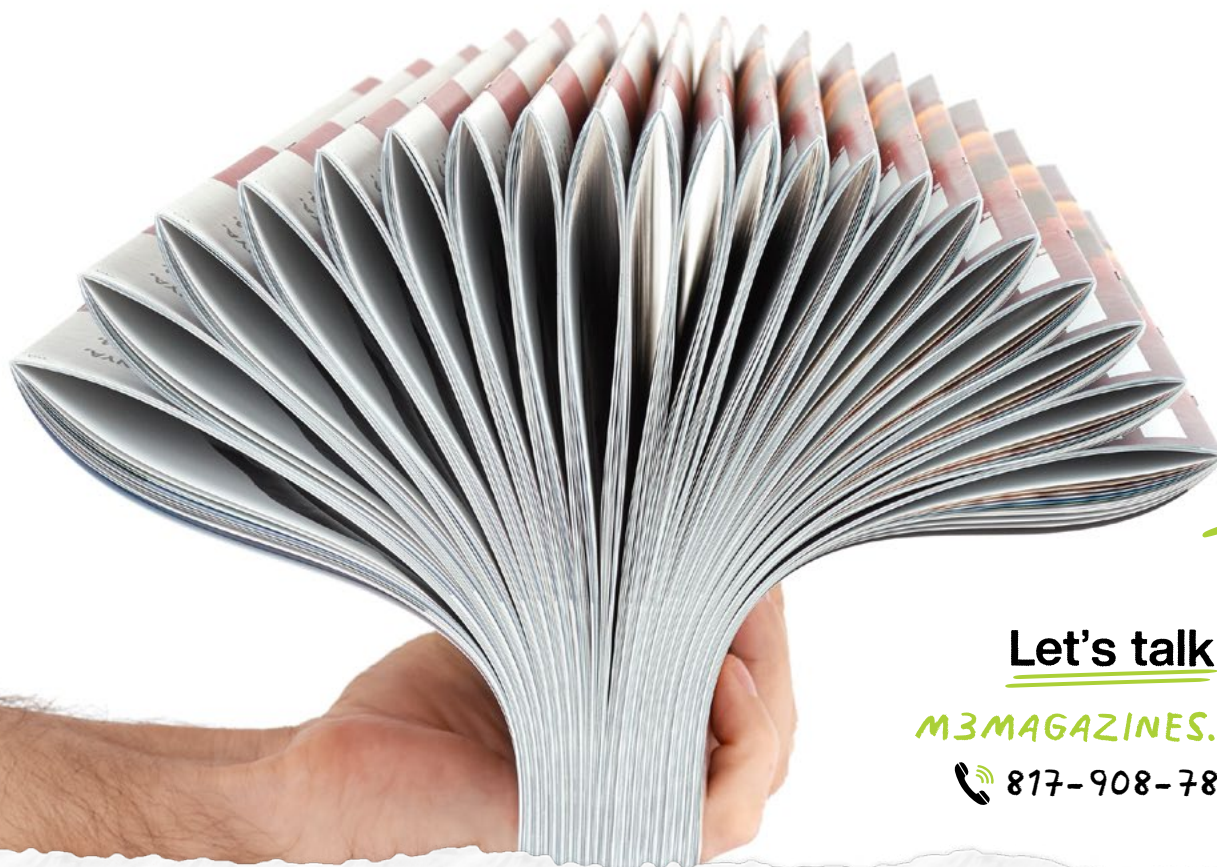
# The Power of Connection and Growth

Magazines have the power to engage and connect. By creating a publication that resonates deeply with your members, you are nurturing that connection. As your members engage with your content, they'll be motivated to learn, share and contribute to the conversations within your association and the industry, fueling a vibrant and thriving community.

As you embark on the journey of a better member publication, remember it's an ongoing one. Seek continual feedback from members, stakeholders and advertisers.


ADOPT AN INNOVATIVE MINDSET THAT  
ALLOWS YOUR PUBLICATION TO **GROW**  
AND **EVOLVE** ALONGSIDE YOUR  
ASSOCIATION AND INDUSTRY.

Remember, your ultimate goal is to create a publication that brings people together, united by a passion for the industry you represent. With planning, intention and creativity, you can create an engaging magazine that truly resonates with your members.



Let's talk

**M3MAGAZINES.COM**

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