



MEMBERSHIP MARKETING IN THE DIGITAL AGE

A Handbook for Museums and Libraries

PATRICIA RICH, DANA S. HINES,
and ROSIE SIEMER

Membership Marketing in the Digital Age

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR STATE AND LOCAL HISTORY BOOK SERIES

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We dedicate this book to everyone who works in membership in nonprofit organizations. For many nonprofits, the membership is the heart and soul of the organization. Having a strong membership program ensures that the organization can accomplish its mission. We applaud the staff and volunteers who strive to make their programs the best that they can be and, in turn, serve their communities.

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Visit www.themembershipbook.com for additional resources, sample campaigns, and case studies.

Foreword

I have my roots in Rock and Roll—and baseball, and museums, and Membership! My museum training is honest—from the Cooperstown Graduate Program in Museum Studies. My baseball and rock and roll background is a result of passions developed through childhood and adolescence. My membership training was through the school of hard knocks and a chance encounter with Dana Hines and Membership Consultants back in the late 1990s.

At the time, my first position out of graduate school was a fortuitous hiring as the Membership Manager at the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York. I was fortunate that the President of the Hall of Fame shared a deep interest in building the membership base. I was invited to a seminar on Membership Marketing hosted by Membership Consultants. When I met Dana, who was a great St. Louis Cardinal Baseball fan herself, I knew that we were of one mind, and that was to significantly grow the membership of the National Baseball Hall of Fame.

Our journey of growth of the Hall of Fame's membership program began with a visit to Cooperstown for Dana, and a comprehensive membership plan that we developed together. Thanks to overall institutional commitment to membership, a healthy pool of untapped interest, and a solid plan, growth came quickly. Utilizing all sources of membership acquisition, including direct mail, a robust effort to capture memberships on-site with a well-trained team, and early adoption of email and online solicitation and communication, we

were very successful. Membership growth, over a three- to four-year time-frame, exceeded 600 percent!

As my career progressed to Director of Development, overseeing membership still at the Baseball Hall of Fame, and now to the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame and Museum, membership remains one of the most powerful assets an organization can possess in fulfilling its overarching mission. Without the power and passion of the people who are members and who commit to our worthwhile endeavors, our institutions would not thrive and prosper.

I am excited that Dana Hines and her fellow authors and membership experts Patricia Rich and Rosie Siemer have created this valuable book that will lead more membership managers to success in their professions. This is the only book that focuses specifically on membership, and the emphasis on digital marketing comes at a critical time when organizations are struggling to catch up, evaluate which areas to invest limited dollars, and understand how digital efforts can support membership.

Membership Marketing in the Digital Age will help shape the next generation of membership leaders and serve to guide organizations forward, preparing them to meet the challenges of tomorrow. It will be an asset to all who seek to grow and flourish in the membership world!

Greg Harris
President and CEO
Rock & Roll Hall of Fame

Preface

In the 1800s Alexis de Tocqueville visited America, where he found that citizens were forever forming associations. As Tocqueville says, the groups can be “religious, moral, serious, futile, very general and very limited, immensely large and very minute.”¹ While the landscape of membership programs still resembles Tocqueville’s descriptions, the proliferation of groups to which we can belong, and the channels for joining, have grown exponentially. For those who are working in membership programs, this provides ever-increasing challenges. This book is a tool to deal with the challenges. It is a primer for anyone who is new to membership programs, interested in beginning one, or involved in growing one. As well, there is information for those who work as paid or volunteer staff in membership programs.

The philosophy behind this book is that planning the program will ensure that the organization’s needs are met. We believe that a thoughtful plan is the first step in implementing a program that will meet the needs of the institution, the community, and the members. With a plan, activities are cohesive, resources are well used, and goals are met. We believe that the membership program should be integral in achieving the institution’s mission. To do that well, we believe that planning is the key.

When we began writing and mentioning to colleagues that our topic was membership, we contended with questions about the church group, the hospital auxiliary, and associations. This was in addition to our fundamental

work with cultural institutions and visitation-based organizations. This led us to decide to include information for all types of groups. As we started thinking about the various types of membership programs, it became clear to us that we needed a way to cope with the variety of groups. We decided to categorize them and developed a chart of types of membership programs. The many types are discussed in chapter 1. This book has information that will be helpful to all membership programs, no matter their type. That said, there is more information in this book for membership programs that are the foundation for fundraising for the institution. We do believe that for many nonprofits, the membership program should be an integrated part of the development effort.

This book provides a thorough background for those who may be new to membership, including what is involved and how membership fits into a larger nonprofit organization or is the basis for the organization itself. As well, the book gives the seasoned membership person new ideas and ways of looking at things and provides an organization considering a membership program with the information it needs to plan and develop one that is appropriate for the institution. Everyone who is involved with a membership program will find new ideas and relevant information that can be applied to help grow and sustain a program.

Throughout the book we have taken the liberty of making recommendations about a number of practices in membership programs. These recommendations are the result of our many years of working with many different types of membership programs and how they fit into the organization's development and other efforts. Not everyone will agree, but until there is more academic research on this topic, we will stand by the recommendations based on what we have experienced and the results we have seen. We hope that all membership staff, whether paid or volunteer, at least consider the suggestions. Too often we find practices in place because "we've always done it that way." Change is difficult, but as we all know, doing things the same way will produce the same results. If different results are desired, then change must occur.

In much of what is involved in membership there are multiple ways of doing things. The issue is to select the method that works for the specific organization. It is important to review the choices on a regular basis. Our fundamental belief is that the membership program must be well planned, effectively executed, and continually evaluated. Without these steps, the

program will be haphazard and reactive—never reaching its full potential or producing the results needed by the organization.

We believe that a membership program offers an effective way to develop a donor base and constituency for an organization. The goal is to grow the member's relationship with the organization while at the same time growing the institution. When the relationships are developed in a thoughtful, attentive, and conscientious manner, the organization will prosper and its mission will be fulfilled.

Due to the advances in technology in recent years, we have experienced an evolution in membership. Rapid adoption of social media and mobile devices combined with intensifying media fragmentation requires new approaches and more sophisticated strategies to reach, engage, and retain members. In addition to the fundamentals of membership management, this book addresses the shift toward multichannel marketing and emphasizes opportunities to leverage digital channels such as online advertising, social media, email, mobile, and marketing automation.

Membership Marketing in the Digital Age is a book about the changing landscape of membership, and how to balance new digital channels with more traditional marketing strategies. Providing insight into the trends shaping the future of membership, this book offers a glimpse into the next generation of members, the coming technologies that will forever change how we reach and communicate with audiences, and the impact of evolving consumer behavior and expectations.

This book is intended to serve as a guide for membership, marketing, and development practitioners, leaders in the nonprofit sector, students in professional programs or continuing education courses, and those seeking to create a new membership program. Throughout the book we have included samples, guidelines, and case studies to provide additional context. Additional resources, sample campaigns, and case studies can be found at www.themembershipbook.com.

NOTE

1. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. G. Lawrence (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 485.

