

Selecting an AMC

By Bill MacMillan, CAE, MBA

“If we can recognize that change and uncertainty are basic principles, we can greet the future and the transformation we are undergoing with the understanding that we do not know enough to be pessimistic.” - Hazel Henderson, futurist author

This quote hit home. We have seen truly significant changes in politics, security, and the economy this past year. Uncertainty is all around us and is redefining how associations are doing business.

It is definitely not business as usual anymore. Nonprofit organizations of all sizes and varieties are redefining themselves and looking for ways to generate more income, re-engineer their structures, increase their membership base, and plainly, just do business differently.

Doing business efficiently, with expertise and experience, are the three E's that guide the operating principles of the association management companies (AMCs) listed in this directory. The three E's are what the American Society of Association Executives AMC Council found to be the critical operating principles of any professional AMC.

Expertise. AMCs have unsurpassed knowledge in managing all aspects of associations and professional societies. Because of the diversity that an AMC is exposed to in its work with various associations, an ideal environment is cultivated so that:

- Cross learning is a necessity; internal best practices are shared with team members
- Intensive staff training is provided by the AMC
- Team members working for an AMC have advanced education and certifications
- Team members are specialists, not generalists
- Standard operating procedures are followed
- AMC staff members are leaders in the profession
- Innovation is encouraged and allowed to flourish

Experience. AMCs, because of their multiple association relationships, have experience serving a wide variety of organizations and helping them meet their organizational objectives. Some key examples:

- AMCs have been instrumental in the growth of their clients
- AMCs have established proven long-term relationships with their clients
- AMCs serve a large market of thousands of associations, employ thousands of people, produce tens of thousands of meetings, and assist hundreds of thousands of members worldwide

Efficiency. AMCs offer associations economies of scale and efficiencies that are not easily duplicated elsewhere. Efficiencies can be found in:

- technology;
- buying power;
- systems and processes;
- staff allocations and hiring;
- time-keeping records; and
- team assignments.

ASAE launched an accreditation program for AMCs last year, further ensuring that AMCs use good business practices and operate legally and ethically. Given this program, nonprofit organizations selecting a management company can deal in certainty in these times of uncertainty.

Trust is critical in any long-term relationship between an association and its management. My colleagues listed in this directory represent a cross-section of professionals who will be able to help launch an organization or assist an established organization to re-engineer or reinvent itself while providing consistent, proactive management. One thing is for sure: AMCs will challenge their clients, develop new ways of thinking, and recommend improvement. Trust is the basis for change.

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