

JOINT MEMBERSHIP: THE “SPECIAL SAUCE” FOR CHAPTER RELATIONS



BY TIM EBNER / MAR 22, 2017

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Joint membership can offer big benefits for associations with component relations for both the national organization and state or local chapters. Members gain advantages too, from discounted dues to access to more programs and services. Here’s how it’s working for two associations.

I love Big Macs. I always have. And yes, I know there are 540 calories in each serving, but there’s something about that special sauce that I crave so badly. I’m not alone, because back in December, McDonald’s decided to giveaway 10,000 bottles of its special sauce. And guess what? They’re selling on eBay—starting bid: \$50,000.

Apparently, there’s another type of special sauce that the association world is craving right now—joint memberships in national organizations and their chapters. Marilee Yorchak, CAE, executive director of the Digital Analytics Association, calls joint membership the “extra-special sauce” that makes component relations successful.

If your association has a national-chapter setup, chances are good you’ve considered the idea of a joint membership model, which offers members a dual enrollment and might come with extra discounts or benefits. A lot of associations are connecting headquarters and local chapters on things like dues collection, membership marketing, and member services.

According to last year’s [Chapter Benchmarking Report \[PDF\]](#) by Mariner Management & Marketing, 31 percent of associations require dual national-chapter membership. And although the arrangement is sometimes viewed skeptically by chapters, it has advantages for both the national and local organizations.

“While your component relations may be federated or not willing to work within the administrative controls of HQ, the two might work together when it comes to streamlining the member experience,” says Kyle Bazzy, director of growth for Billhighway, a Detroit-based company that offers technology and automation software for associations with components.

The biggest advantage to joint membership is that national and chapter dues are rolled together in one payment, and typically there’s a savings passed on to the member. There’s ongoing debate over whether members want bundled savings or the flexibility of a la carte options. But it seems some are taking to the power of bundling with joint membership.

CHAPTER BENEFITS

Earlier this month, the New Jersey State Nurses Association decided to join a pilot program offered by the American Nurses Association, which offers a bundled deal. While NJSNA has been working in partnership with ANA for years, it’s now one of 25 state-based nursing associations participating in a dual membership.

“Joint membership makes it much more affordable for nurses to join national and our chapter,” says Judy Schmidt, CEO of NJSNA. “We are anticipating that more nurses will join us this year because dual membership comes at a 46 percent price reduction.”

Schmidt says the cost to join is a big barrier for many New Jersey nurses. Right now, NJSNA has about 3,500 members. She says that number is likely to grow under the ANA partnership, which offers additional benefits and savings on malpractice insurance, nurses’ uniforms, and certification and continuing education programs.

NATIONAL ADVANTAGES

There are plenty of examples where the “special sauce” of joint membership can grow or support local chapters. But national organizations stand to gain too, Bazzy says.

“Joint membership can really amplify the work and voice of national,” he says. “And in many cases, the member impacts are much bigger for national.”

Bazzy calls chapters and local volunteers the “boots on the ground” operation. Organizations that embrace chapters and use them as advocates are able to successfully connect on issues with policymakers. These types of associations are also more likely to recruit high-quality volunteers and see higher levels of membership retention, he says.

It’s a critical advantage for the Global Business Travel Association, where joint membership makes it possible to communicate directly and efficiently with their 9,000 members, based in 39 chapters spread across the world. Two years ago, GBTA launched All-Access Membership. This joint membership offering, which 29 chapters currently participate in, helps headquarter staff to remain in touch with their local counterparts, says Patrick Algyer, senior manager of volunteer relations.

“The biggest benefit has been the streamlining of direct marketing and communication to chapter members,” Algyer says. “In the past, those types of communication would have to be relayed through multiple people and a [chapter] chain of command.”

Each chapter maintains regional autonomy as an independent association, but the joint membership agreement helps GBTA to expand the reach of programs, like their continuing education series. And like members of NJSNA, chapter members get a dues discount—a savings of \$50 on dual membership.

Having a direct line to state and local members, particularly when you’re a large, global association, can be a huge advantage, Algyer says. Technology and automation tools are some of the biggest drivers of a shift to joint membership. With marketing automation, it’s now possible for national and chapters to maintain cohesive and consistent messaging, Bazzy says. That’s good news for members who often struggle to differentiate between communications from national and local organizations.

“A complete chapter restructure is sometimes politically impossible,” Bazzy says. “So I think what you’re going to see is that a lot of associations are testing out joint membership, and they are finding ways to align and work together.”

Are you making the move to joint membership? What are some of the expected payoffs or benefits associated with your partnership? Put your answers in the message thread below.