connections>

The Official Magazine of the
Georgia Society of Association Executives

WINTER 15

connecting leaders, advancing associations

THE DATA-DRIVEN ASSOCIATION

Improve Outcomes with Data-Driven Decisions

GSAE
GEORGIA SOCIETY OF ASSOCIATION EXECUTIVES

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DEPARTMENTS

FEATURES

message from the chair

Less is More ... Most of the Time

WE'VE ALL HEARD the saying that "less is more," and that holds true in many cases. Take legislation as an example. Business and industry would agree that less government oversight leads to greater success for businesses and lower costs for consumers. With our state legislative session in full swing, let's hope this will be a "light" year when it comes to new regulations — as we have plenty already, thank you.

When it comes to delivering value to our members, though, more is better and GSAE is all about doing and providing more. 2015 is certainly shaping up to be a great year for what our association will deliver to GSAE members. A wide-ranging host of activities is in the planning stages for this year to enhance your careers and have a good time in the process. Take a look!

- April 15 - GSAE Quarterly Luncheon at Sonesta Gwinnett Place featuring Aaron Wolowiec
- May 27-29 - GSAE Annual Meeting in Charleston, South Carolina
- July 8 - GSAE Summer Luncheon, featuring an Ignite program
- Sept. 16 - GSAE Quarterly Luncheon, The Abit Massey Lecture Series featuring University of Georgia President Jere Morehead
- Oct. 2015 - GSAE Leadership Academy begins
- Nov. 11 - GSAE Tradeshow & Quarterly Luncheon at the Georgia World Congress Center
- Dec. 9 - GSAE Holiday Luncheon, Awards Show & Silent Auction

What about data? More is definitely better when it comes to data, especially as it relates to managing associations. Are you tracking trends and various metrics within your association, and using that data in your decision-making processes?

Surprisingly, a recent study by association management software developer Advanced Solutions International (ASI) found in a global survey of over 500 association executives that a sizable portion lack a clear picture of some key membership metrics.

Surprisingly, a recent study by association management software developer Advanced Solutions International (ASI) found in a global survey of over 500 association executives that a sizable portion lack a clear picture of some key membership metrics, such as:

- 21 percent didn't know their member retention rate
- 25 percent didn't know their membership market share compared to their overall market potential
- 32 percent didn't know if their engagement rate went up or down in the previous year

Those are certainly useful metrics to know, pretty basic actually. Resources will vary among associations, but basic membership numbers like retention, market share, and engagement (however defined for your organization) should be within reach, no matter your circumstances. Dedicate some effort to collecting good data, and use that to make a difference!

Jim Fowler, CAE
President, Atlanta Apartment Association

Save the Date for GSAE Events in 2015

To help you plan your professional development year, GSAE's current calendar of events is available below. We will offer more than 25 hours of CAE-matched programming this year. GSAE is a Preferred CAE Provider through the CAE Commission. Our list of events is always available online at www.gsae.org (Learn/Calendar View). Various Shared Interest Group meetings and webinars will be added throughout the year. We look forward to seeing you in 2015!

Apr 15

APRIL

GSAE Quarterly Luncheon at Sonesta Gwinnett Place

Sponsored by Richmond Region Tourism

May 27-29

MAY

GSAE Annual Meeting in Charleston, South Carolina

Book your room and explore sponsorship opportunities online

July 8

JULY

GSAE Summer Luncheon, featuring an Ignite program

Sponsored by Coral Hospitality
Hosting opportunity available

Sep 16

SEPTEMBER

GSAE Quarterly Luncheon, The Abit Massey Lecture Series featuring University of Georgia President Jere Morehead

Sponsored by Augusta Convention & Visitors Bureau
Hosting opportunity available

Nov 11

NOVEMBER

GSAE Tradeshow & Quarterly Luncheon at Georgia World Congress Center

Sponsorship opportunities available

Dec 9

DECEMBER

GSAE Holiday Luncheon, Awards Show & Silent Auction

Sponsored by The Georgia Center's UGA Hotel and Conference Center and Athens Convention & Visitors Bureau
Hosting opportunity available

GSAE Sponsorship and Hosting Opportunities

Luncheons are the primary venue for networking in GSAE. About 200 members generally attend each luncheon, which is preceded by a 30-minute networking reception. Your exclusive sponsorship includes an exhibit table during the networking reception, 2-3 minutes of podium time, rights to leave a brochure or flyer on each seat, luncheon registration for 5 people, recognition in promotional materials and post-event attendee mailing labels. November is still available for sponsorship.

The **host property** of each luncheon will receive a reserved table during registration, the opportunity to place material at each place setting, podium time, significant exposure and an attendee mailing list following the luncheon. This is a great opportunity to showcase your property! All GSAE luncheons are on Wednesdays. Available 2015 dates are: July 8, September 18 and December 9.

The **Annual Meeting** remains GSAE's top professional development program. We expect a total conference attendance of close to 200 members and guests. The Annual Meeting runs from Wednesday afternoon through Friday afternoon. In 2015 GSAE will be in Charleston May 27-29. All sponsors will be recognized in print and electronic promotional materials, in the annual meeting program and with signage and a gift during the meeting. Available sponsorship opportunities include general sessions, breakout sessions and breaks.

Please visit www.gsae.org (Support/Sponsorships) or call the GSAE office at (404) 577-7850 for more details.

2015 GSAE Annual Meeting, May 27-29 in Charleston, South Carolina

See the paper registration form in this issue!

- $295 association executive
- $350 corporate supplier members
- $195 special pricing for additional staff from the same organization and our retired members
- Keynote speakers are Sarah Levitt, Reggie Henry, CAE and Shelly Alcorn, CAE
- 3 workshops on Wednesday, including topics around technology (MemberClicks, YourMembership.com), aspiring/inspiring CEOs (Lowell Aplebaum, CAE; Greg Melia, CAE) and a TBD
- 16 Breakout sessions featuring absolute rock stars of the association world - Bob Harris, CAE; Lowell Aplebaum, CAE; Jim Thompson, IOM, CAE; Reggie Henry, CAE; Connie Bergeron, CMP; Cynthia Mills, FASAE, CAE; Teri Carden; Shelly Alcorn, CAE; Adrienne Bryant, CAE; John Chen Dear, CAE; a representative from the Technology Association of Georgia (TAG)
- 3K charity run Friday morning
- Silent Auction & Connections Sponsor Lounge
- Ends by noon on Friday

American Associations Day 2015

American Associations Day is the only legislative fly-in where association professionals like you can connect with Congressional offices and share your story on important association issues, like tax reform, allowing federal employees to attend private meetings or nonprofit governance. On March 18-19, 2015, association executives will visit Washington, D.C. to advocate for vital association issues. This unique opportunity allows you to create connections with policy-makers that will not only advance the association industry, but your own organization as well.

The event is open to any association executive, staff member, or leadership volunteer that is passionate about association issues and wants to make a difference, as well as meet and network with fellow advocates from across the country.

There is no registration fee for this event. Additionally, a scholarship is available for attendees who make Hill visits that are from outside the DC-metro area. To RSVP for this year's fly-in contact Rob Magleby, ASAE public policy manager at (202) 626-2719 or rmagleby@asaecenter.org.

THE POWER OF (A)

STRONGER BY ASSOCIATION

Holiday Silent Auction

Thanks to our generous donors and bidders at the Holiday Luncheon, we were able to raise more than $6,400 to help support the high level, quality programming we all enjoy at our meetings and conferences. In 2014, the silent auction committee produced 111 donations and raised more than $18,000! A huge thank to you committee co-chairs **Charron Hope** and **Karla Yeck**, along with the entire Silent Auction Committee and everyone who bid at either of our auctions! Check out a list of our donors online and thank them for supporting GSAE.

Congratulations to GSAE's newest Certified Association Executives

Earning the CAE credential is the hallmark of a committed association professional. It helps drive professional self-confidence, opens doors, creates connections, and offers widespread value and recognition for candidates. Congratulations to GSAE's newest CAEs.

Amy Kane, CAE
Director, Core Programs
Rheumatology Research Foundation

Jennifer Poff, CAE
Director, Peer Review
Georgia Society of Certified Public Accountants

Mary Wheatley, IOM, CAE
Executive Director
Rheumatology Research Foundation

Eventeract Save the Date

EVENTERACT
MAY 12-13, 2015
ATLANTA CONVENTION CENTER AT AMERICASMART

Eventeract returns on May 12-13, 2015 at Atlanta Convention Center at AmericasMart.

- Streamlined education sessions, followed by dedicated exhibit floor hours featuring one-on-one appointments
- Streamlined exhibit pricing and enhanced appointment software
- Hands-on, interactive workshops for continuing education, including master classes with industry leading experts

Ignite Task Force – July 8, 2015

We are looking for association and corporate supplier professionals who are interested in programming our July 8th Luncheon. The goal is to showcase our members' success stories in 5 minute, 20 slide segments. Contact Wendy to participate or apply to be a speaker.

Web Warriors Wanted

2015 promises to be an exciting year for GSAE's social media strategy. If you can answer yes to any of these questions and want to engage your peers across the electronic realm, let us know!

- Love LinkedIn? Do you spend time on it weekly? Help us manage our subgroups, promote conversations and lead our connections to GSAE membership.
- Thrilled to be on Twitter? Do you dream in hashtags? Automatically convert links to tiny urls in your head?
- Fascinated by Facebook? Get admin status and have at it with pictures, links, events and "boosts."
- Community Czars. With the new website here, we need volunteers to lead our connection points in the members-only communities.

new members *Through January 21, 2015*

Katherine Anderson
Convention Sales Manager
The Classic Center

Tim Aylsworth
Director of Sales & Marketing
Sea Palms Resort &
Conference Center

Amelia Baer
Vice President, Membership Sales
Technology Association of Georgia

Rashelle Beasley, TMP
Director
Albany Convention &
Visitors Bureau

Linda Bell
Senior Sales Manager
Inn at Ellis Square

Florencia Branagan
Sales Manager
Wyndham Bay Point Resort & Spa

LaVerne Brown
Director - Sales
Delta Flight Museum

Katelyn Bryant
Sales Manager
Le Meridien Atlanta Perimeter

Lynn Caldwell
Sales Manager
Holiday Inn & Suites Atlanta
Airport - North

Annetta Campbell Davis
Senior Sales Manager
Atlanta Marriott Northwest
at Galleria

Lindsay Corley
Membership Manager
Georgia Veterinary
Medical Association

Jennifer Dahlberg
Group Sales Manager
One Ocean Resort & Spa

Paul Dake
National Sales Manager
Renaissance World Golf
Village Resort

Nathan DeVictor
Golf Event Consultant
Magnolia Golf Group

Luis A. Dieppa
National Sales Manager
Experient

Carolyn Dodd
Executive Director
Professional Insurance Agents of
Georgia & Alabama

Rosetta Ephraim
Associate Director of Sales &
Marketing
Macon Marriott City Center Hotel

Paula Fronimo
Regional Sales Manager
Coral Hospitality

James Gauntt
Executive Director
Railway Tie Association

Tonya Graham
Atlanta Area Account Manager
Dalton CVB/Northwest Georgia
Trade & Convention Center

April Grennan
Sales Manager
Lanier Islands Legacy Lodge

Amanda Hendley
Chief Operating Officer
Technology Association of Georgia

Lydia Hires
Sales Manager
Atlanta Marriott Buckhead Hotel &
Conference Center

Tamlyn Horne
Sales Executive
Georgia World Congress Center

Aprell King
Sales Manager
Atlanta Convention & Visitors
Bureau

Shelley Korb
Public Relations
American Income Life Insurance
Company of Georgia

Brittney Love
Director, Finance & Operations
American Council of
Engineering Companies of Georgia
(ACEC Georgia)

Carlos Morales
Director of Sales & Marketing
Augusta Marriott at
the Convention Center

Helen Anne Richards
President
HA Richards Writing & Editing

Angie Rowe
Sales Manager
Ramada Plaza Atlanta Downtown
Capitol Park Hotel

Dianne Sagaas
Director, Professional
Development & Member
Services MISBO

Katerina Taylor
President & CEO
Dekalb Chamber of Commerce

Nancy Tutt
Sales Manager
Hilton Atlanta/Marietta Hotel &
Conference Center

Sasha Ugi
Director of
Communications & Marketing
American Council of
Engineering Companies of
Georgia (ACEC Georgia)

Mikki Walls
Director of Sales
Myrtle Beach Area
Convention & Visitors Bureau

Jamie Wilkinson
Senior Sales Manager
Omni Amelia Island Plantation

members on the move

Michael T. Walsh, CAE
Chief Executive Officer
Independent Insurance
Agents of Georgia

Aubie Knight, CRM, CIC
Chief Executive Officer
Independent Insurance Agents of
North Carolina

Jim Fowler, CAE
President
Atlanta/Georgia
Apartment Association

Jim Bracewell
President
The Bracewell Group, LTD

Chuck Manley, BME
Executive Director
CM2 Group, LLC

Amanda Biffle
Sales Manager
The Inn at Sea Island

IMPROVE OUTCOMES WITH DATA-DRIVEN DECISIONS

BY MARY LOU JAY

"Data is something that really scares people," says **Sarah J. Berke, CAE,** director of client services at Nardone Consulting Group. "The idea of taking all of this information and digesting it and analyzing it and drawing conclusions is terrifying. But it actually can be a lot of fun."

Sarah J. Berke, CAE, director of client services at Nardone Consulting Group

CAN USING DATA for decision-making and strategic planning really benefit your association? Consider the experience of some organizations that **Sarah J. Berke, CAE**, director of client services at Nardone Consulting Group, has managed.

One association held several regional meetings each year. After analyzing the registration information for those events, the association found that many of the attendees were non-members. "So we placed some restrictions on non-members attending to make sure that this benefit of membership wasn't being diluted by people freeloading," said Berke.

Some non-members must have missed the meetings, because the association enjoyed a 10 percent increase in membership the next year. That boost probably wouldn't have occurred if association leaders hadn't used available data to decide on a change.

Another of Berke's organizations used existing data to determine if the dues they were charging were appropriate. "We did a pretty significant analysis and really dug into the financial and membership information to determine what it cost them to have a member. How much does serving each individual member cost?" Berke said. The association broke out all of the expenses and revenues outside of their annual conference, which is self-funding and actually subsidizes some member expenses. The board determined that dues were somewhat low and chose to increase them because they wanted the financial flexibility to introduce some new programs.

Start with good questions

There are many examples of the ways in which organizations can use data to inform decision making and strategic planning. But even when they see the benefits, some organizations are reluctant to get started.

"Data is something that really scares people. The idea of taking all of this information and digesting it and analyzing it and drawing conclusions is terrifying," said Berke. "But it actually can be a lot of fun."

She advises associations to start by asking these questions. "What do I want to know? Why do I want to know it? How is it important? How am I going to use it?"

Once an association has formulated its questions, its leaders and staff members can look at the data that they already have to determine if it is sufficient to provide the answers they need. Readily available information includes membership demographics, financial information, conference attendance, etc.

"I've found that there is a plethora of data available, but people are just not necessarily asking the right questions about how to look at it or use it," Berke said. "Even those who are asking the right questions may not be doing it in a way that allows for taking it and finding the conclusions. It's hard to take a bunch of data and figure out how it all fits together."

Berke cautions that associations need to keep a big-picture perspective when analyzing data and finding answers to the questions they've raised. "It's like doing a giant puzzle. You have all the pieces, and you have to put the pieces together, but you also have to step back while you're doing that and consider what the ultimate picture is going to be. If you don't keep your eye on where you're going, it's really easy to get sucked into the data and never draw any conclusions."

Gathering more data

When associations decide they need additional data, they can ask members to share more information on their renewal forms or ask them to answer online or mailed surveys. Associations should also consider surveying sponsors and other people who are not members but are primary stakeholders who have a vested interest in the association's success.

The results of such surveys can be invaluable. One of Berke's association clients was putting together a strategic plan when board members decided they needed more data. So the group surveyed its members online by asking open-ended questions about the organization's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges.

The association had a significant response rate—10 percent—and got a real sense of what its members were concerned about. This helped the board develop a meaningful long-term plan. "There was more buy-in from the leaders. They feel a significant amount of responsibility to see this plan through and to accomplish what they've outlined because they truly believe they are representing what the members want," said Berke.

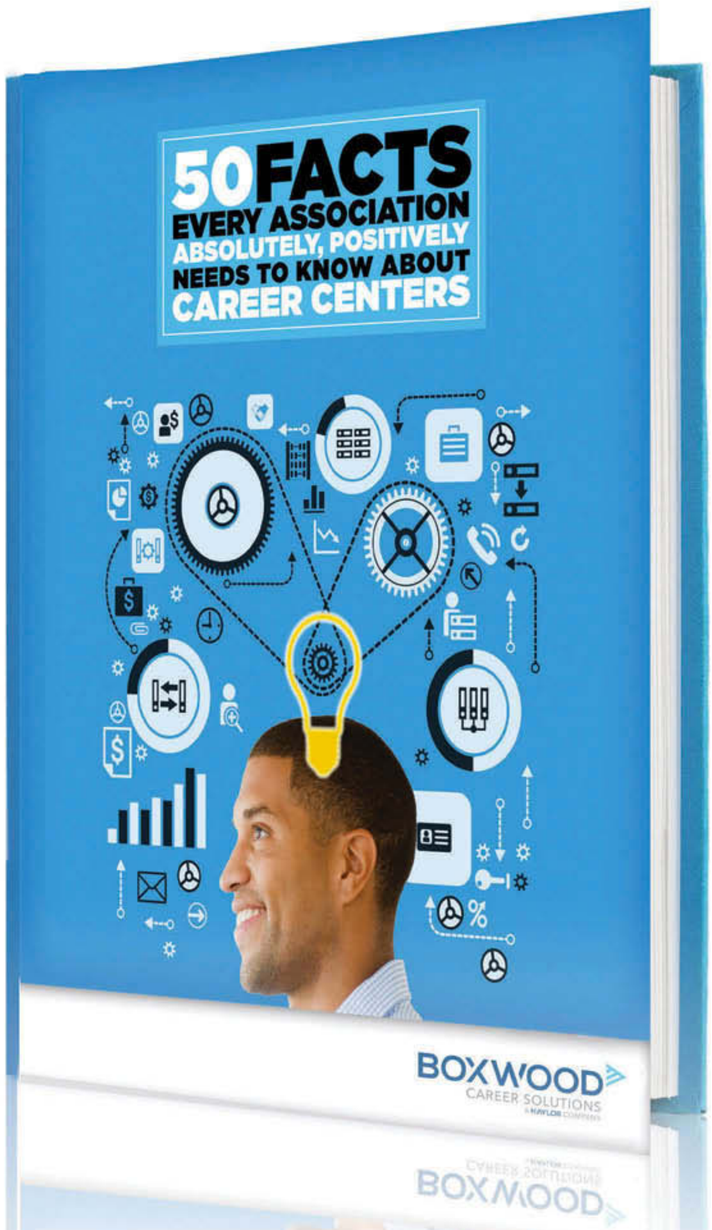
Not getting a response to a survey can also be considered data, she added. One group that was thinking about offering a new program surveyed both members and non-members to get their thoughts on its potential. There was no response from non-members, and only lukewarm response from members. That indicated a lack of interest in the potential program, so the board shelved the idea.

Data grounds gut-instinct and seat-of-the-pants decision making in reality rather than in guesswork.

Factoring in the culture

To be successful in using data, associations must have staff and leadership who are inquisitive and analytical by nature, Berke said. "It's not necessarily sitting down with certain data and saying, 'What can I learn from this?' It's coming from a question, such as 'I'm curious about how many of our members represent this type of business or this segment of the business so I know that whether pursuing this idea I have is worthwhile.'"

Data analysis is really every staff member's job, she added. "They need to pay attention to information, ask


50 FACTS
EVERY ASSOCIATION
ABSOLUTELY, POSITIVELY
NEEDS TO KNOW ABOUT
CAREER CENTERS
BOXWOOD
CAREER SOLUTIONS

the questions, find the answers and look at how the association can use that information in the larger context of operations."

Association executives who want to build a data-friendly culture can do so by modeling it in their own work. They must also allow sufficient time for staff to do an analysis, Berke said. Analyzing data is not a matter of sitting down, looking at numbers for a few hours and coming to a conclusion. "You have to do it for a while, then go away from it, give yourself some mental space and then come back to see what new conclusions come to you."

It's also important to remember that data is just one factor to use in decision-making. "There are no substitutes for having an understanding of the culture or of the association and of using intuition and gut instinct. But data is important because it forms the foundation for how you use that and how you apply those things," said Berke.

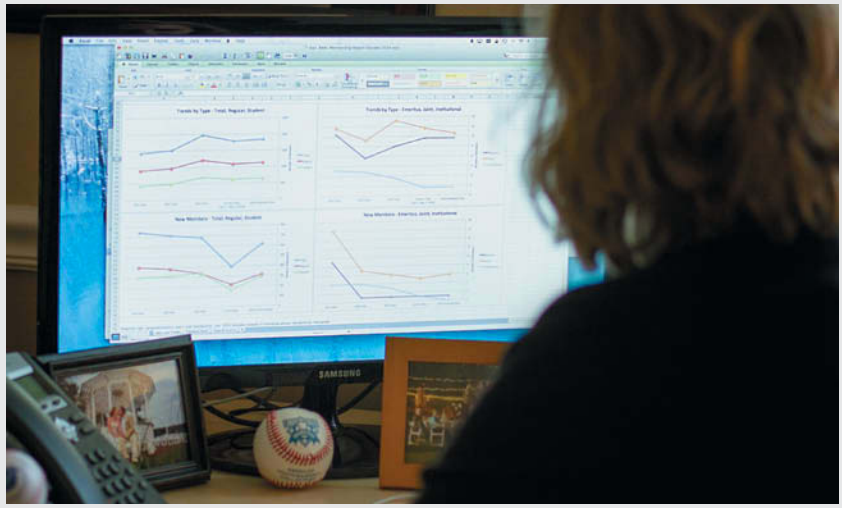
Data grounds gut-instinct and seat-of-the-pants decision making in reality rather than in guesswork.

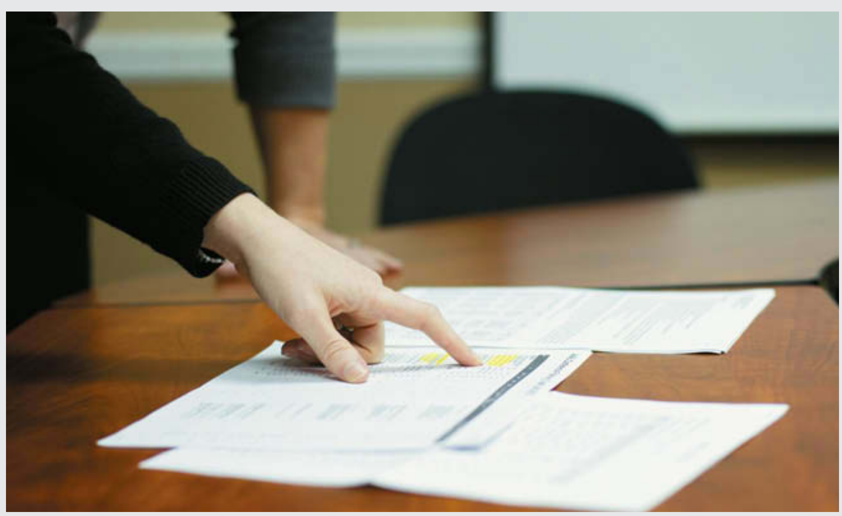
Earning members' trust

Even as they acknowledge the usefulness of data in decision making, some association members and leaders may be concerned about the privacy issues in collecting and using it. "There's a lot of data going to places where it shouldn't go and being used in a way that's not appropriate," Berke said, referring to the recent Sony breach that resulted in the release of confidential files and data.

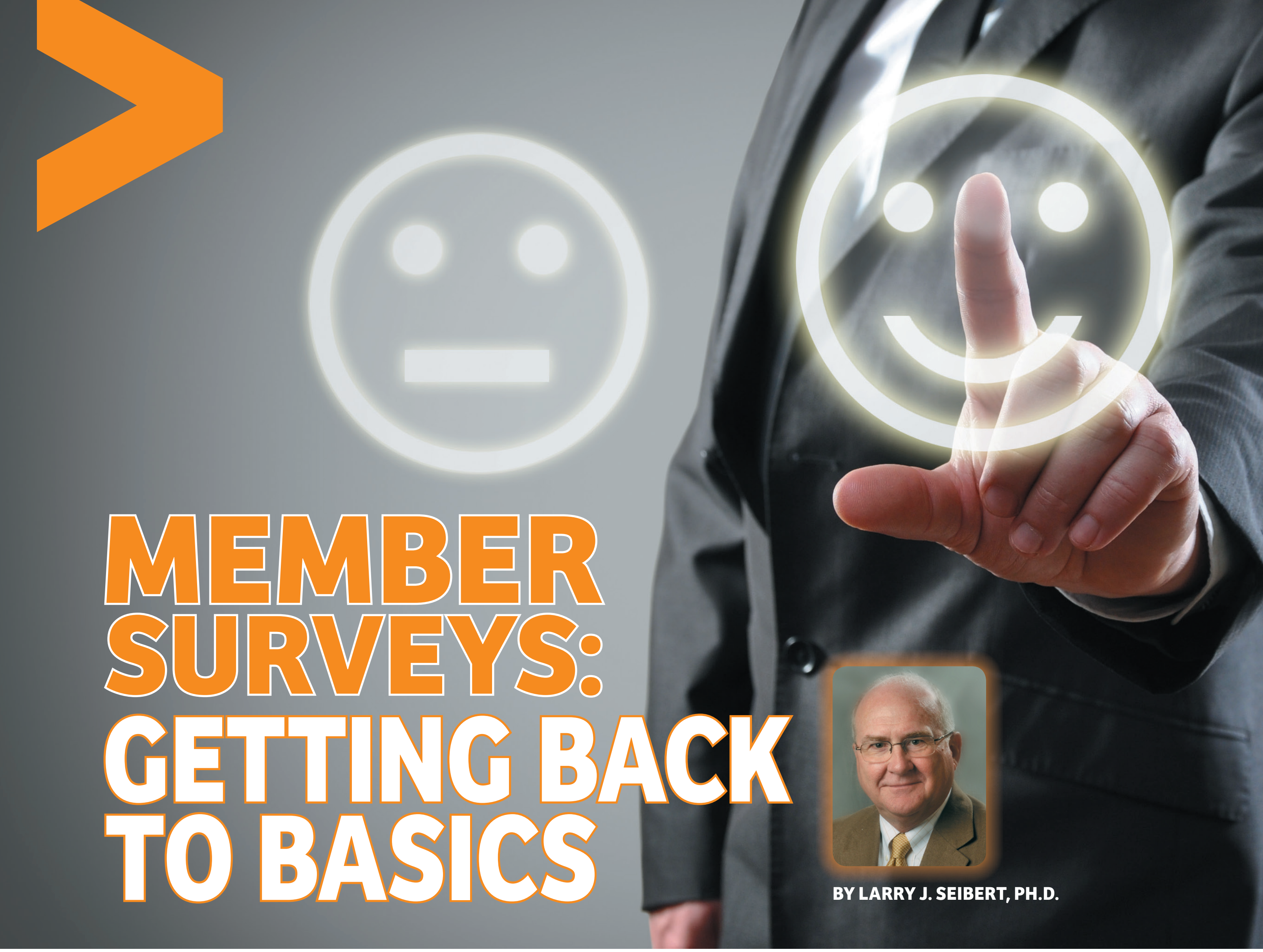
Associations have a responsibility to ensure that members' data is not misused. "You have to make sure that where you're storing your data is secure, that only the staff has access to it and that the data is reported only in aggregate, not individually," she said.

Berke compared collecting data to collecting dues. "Members are entrusting the money to you to do good things with it; it's the same with the data. They are entrusting us to take the information that they give us and use it in a relevant way that is going to make their professional lives better."





Data analysis is really every staff member's job, Berke says. "They need to pay attention to information, ask the questions, find the answers and look at how the association can use that information in the larger context of operations."



MEMBER SURVEYS: GETTING BACK TO BASICS

BY LARRY J. SEIBERT, PH.D.

OVER THE YEARS of presenting research workshops to association executives, the same basic questions seem to be raised in almost every workshop. This article provides answers to those commonly asked questions.

What size sample do I need?

Researchers will draw a sample, instead of contacting each member of the population, when they want to save time and/or money. When using an online survey, we recommend contacting the entire population, since the time and money involved is the same for the entire membership as it is for a sample. Surveying all members gives everyone the opportunity to offer their opinions, exposes all members to the marketing effects of the survey, and produces more completed surveys. When you contact all members you eliminate sampling bias and eliminate the need to oversample small segments of your membership.

If you are collecting data via telephone and you have no experience from previous telephone studies, start with an estimated response rate of 50 percent. If you are planning a mail survey, use an estimated response rate of 10 percent.

How many completed surveys do I need for statistical significance?

The confidence level that is typically used in social science research is 95 percent. A level of precision of ±5 percent at 95 percent confidence can be achieved with 383 responses, if you have 100,000 members or more. Smaller associations would need fewer completed surveys to achieve the same level of precision (example: 357 completed surveys are needed for an association with 5,000 members).

When analyzing responses by demographic characteristic, 30 respondents per segment are recommended.

How long can my survey be?

Survey length is critical, because the longer the survey, the more likely it is that respondent fatigue will set in, resulting in less thought being put into questions later in the survey, and increasing the likelihood that respondents will abandon the survey. A rule

of thumb is that it should take no longer to complete a survey than it takes to drink a cup of coffee. Ideally, surveys should be able to be completed in ten minutes or less. This applies to paper surveys as well as online surveys. Telephone surveys can generally be a little longer because of the ability of the interviewer to engage the respondent.

You can increase the completion rate on longer surveys by using questions that require less mental processing. It is easier for a respondent to choose an alternative from a closed ended question than to provide a written response to an open ended question. If you are asking questions about numerical amounts (e.g. income), allow respondents to select from ranges of numbers rather than requiring them to provide an exact amount.

When faced with a long survey, eliminate questions that do not specifically address the objectives of the study. Resist the temptation to ask questions that would be "nice to know."

For online surveys, respondents will be more willing to complete a longer survey if there is a progress meter on each page that allows them to estimate how much more time it will take to complete the survey.

How can I shorten the survey without sacrificing information?

You can eliminate some of the demographic questions in the survey if you can retrieve this information from the respondent's membership records. By capturing the respondent's member identification number or some other identifier (e.g. email address) in the survey, you can append information from your internal database to members' survey responses.

In some cases, questions can be combined. For example, instead of asking respondents if they have ever attended the Annual Convention (yes/no), and then follow up an affirmative response with a question regarding when they last attended, simply ask respondents when they last attended the Annual Convention and include the alternative "Have never attended."

Survey questions should not be combined if two separate factors are being rated. For example, do not ask members to rate the feature on your association website that allows members to register and pay for events online. Registering and paying are two different factors, and members may want to rate these two factors differently. In general, if a survey question contains the word "and," it is probably combining two separate factors and the question needs to be broken into separate questions.

Should I offer an incentive, and if so, what kind?

We recommend using an incentive in order to generate a higher response rate. This helps to ensure the representativeness of the survey participants, the larger number of completed surveys provides for a higher level of statistical precision, and more completed surveys enable more segmentation analyses.

Some researchers prefer to give a small incentive to every participant. We have found that a sweepstakes drawing of three to five larger prizes provides more of an incentive, limits the financial liability to only those items, provides for more manageable fulfillment, and is less likely to encourage individuals to repeat the survey in order to get multiple incentives.

The incentives can be cash based (e.g. $100 gift card), merchandise based (iPad), or association based (free annual membership renewal). The key to any incentive is that it has to have sufficient value to the member to encourage participation, without breaking the bank. We recommend the cash based incentive, as some individuals will likely already have the merchandise being offered, and some members have their memberships reimbursed.

Does the order in which the questions are presented in the survey make a difference?

As you arrange your questions, think of a funnel — wide at the top and tapering to a narrow spout at the bottom. Your survey should start with general questions, and then get more specific as the survey progresses. Keep in mind that any information revealed in early questions will influence the respondents' frame of mind for later questions. Asking members to rate the value of their membership early in the survey will produce different results than asking them to rate the value of their membership after they have been asked to rate the association's member benefits, advocacy efforts, meetings, educational programs and website. We prefer to ask members to rate the value of their membership early in the survey for a top-of-the-mind unbiased opinion.

We also recommend that overall rating questions be asked before detailed rating questions. Therefore, ask members to rate educational programs overall before asking them to rate your specific educational programs, overall website before details of the website, and so on.

The questions that are more personal in nature, such as demographic questions, should be placed at the end of the survey. Respondents are less likely to abandon a survey when faced with personal questions once they have invested several minutes in taking the survey. Only the demographic questions that are used as qualifiers for skip patterns should be used early in the survey.

We use different scales for our questions. Do the scales matter much?

Researchers who studied scales concluded that the optimal number of scale points is five to seven. A scale with five data points provides sufficient discrimination for statistical analyses, and seven data points is typically the most that individuals can process. Researchers concluded that participants who are presented with a ten point scale tend to use the lower part of the scale if they are somewhat pessimistic by nature, and focus on the upper end of the scale if they are generally more optimistic.

While a 7 point numeric scale (1 – 7) may be simple to administer, the underlying problem with any numeric scale is that respondents are free to define each data point, i.e. the respondent decides what constitutes a rating of 5, compared to a rating of 6. Researchers have found that labeled scales (e.g. excellent, very good, good, fair, poor) provide more reliability than numeric scales and are more consistently interpreted.

What is the purpose of asking demographic questions?

The demographic information of each respondent needs to be collected for two reasons. First, demographic information allows for segmentation analyses of responses. In addition to understanding how all participants as a group responded to a particular question, it is also valuable to know where there are significant differences by member segments (e.g. type of member, age, gender, geographic region, certifications held, professional specializations, etc.).

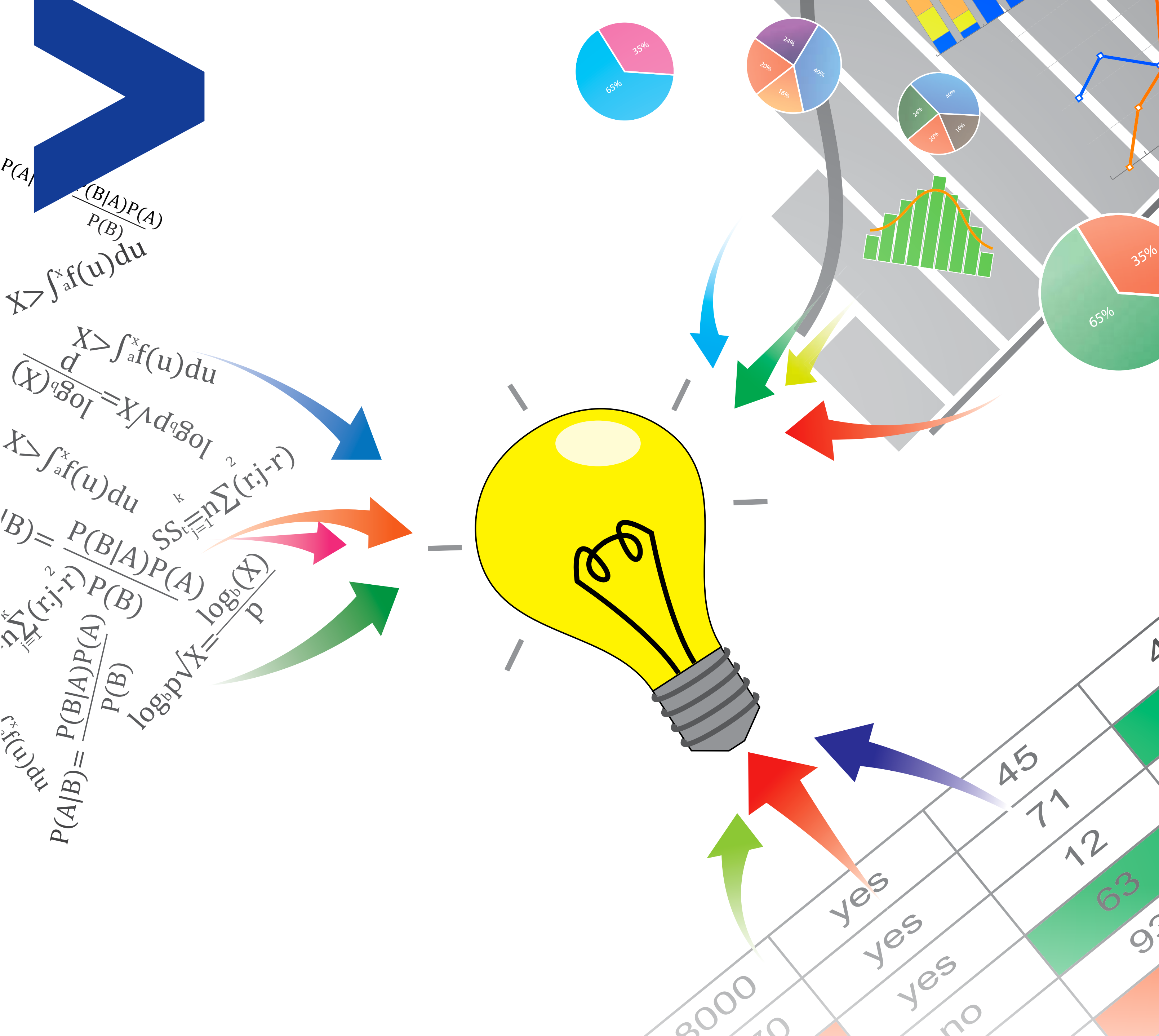
Second, by comparing the demographic characteristics of the respondents to the demographic characteristics of your entire member population, you can determine the representativeness of the survey participants and determine if weights need to be applied, and how to apply them. (Weights are used by researchers to ensure that results are not influenced by underrepresented or overrepresented segments of the membership.)

What is wrong with presenting research results as averages?

An average is an appropriate statistic for questions regarding amounts (e.g. income, length of membership, time spent on website, etc.). Presenting the results of attitudinal questions as averages is misleading. If one member rates an educational session as excellent, and another member rates the session as poor, the average would show that you have two members who rated the session as average, which is not the case. Remember that when using averages, high responses and low responses offset each other.

A better statistic for presenting attitudes and opinions is the Top 2 rating. This simple statistic uses a five point labeled scale (excellent, very good, good, fair, and poor) and presents the cumulative percentage of those who gave an excellent or very good rating. Conceptually, this can be thought of as the percentage of members who gave a grade of A or B.

Larry J. Seibert, Ph.D. is the President/CEO of Association Metrics, a research and consulting firm that specializes in voice-of-the-member association research for strategic planning. He can be reached at larry@associationmetrics.com or by phone at 317-840-2303. If you would like answers to your research questions, or would like copies of the author's research papers at no charge, visit www.associationmetrics.com.



YOUR DATA TELLS YOU WHAT MEMBERS WANT; USE IT

BY KELLY DONOVAN CLARK

YOU MAY HAVE noticed that when surfing the Web or checking your Facebook news feed, the ads that appear in the margins of your browser are eerily on-target. How does Google know

Try These Data Collection Tools

You can use a fancy integrated software system to monitor your membership activity, but many are expensive and come with a learning curve. If you want to ease into active data collection and analysis before investing in a slicker system, try these free tools:

Google Analytics: One of the most popular website tracking systems available, it is also one of the most extensive and user-friendly. Google helps you track standard metrics like visitors and page views, and also allows you to set up custom reports that link your social media and AdWords campaigns to visitor goals.

HootSuite: This program can help you monitor all your social media accounts in one place. HootSuite is a Web-based analytics and social media management platform. This program can tell you how many people have "liked" your Facebook posts, retweeted your tweets or joined your circles on Google+. HootSuite also can help you keep tabs on your WordPress blog or Foursquare campaign. Broadcast messages across all or some of your accounts from HootSuite, and schedule posts ahead of time if you're going to be out of the office. Free and premium plans are available.

Facebook Insights: Standard with every Facebook page, Facebook's proprietary tracking program helps you see trends in fan acquisitions, "like" activity, comments and audience demographics. Though more limited than other third-party Facebook analytic programs, it's a good place to start for those intimidated by tracking Web stats.

SurveyMonkey: When you can create an unlimited number of online surveys up to 10 questions long and collect up to 100 responses for free, you have the ability to create event registrations easily, poll your members about past events and future ideas, and ask how your association can better meet their expectations any time you want. (Online surveys are one of the easiest ways to efficiently collect qualitative anecdotes.) SurveyMonkey offers basic reports about the responses you collect in its free model and more complex, automated analysis in its premium models.

Spreadsheet: A blank spreadsheet (electronic or, for those of you who like it old school, paper) is still the most versatile, customizable and cost-effective data tracking tool out there. Start here if the only information you have right now is member contact information or the number of people who attended your last meeting. As you settle into a routine of data collection and brainstorm new information you want to collect, add sheets and charts to detect activity trends.

Data collection can be time-consuming, but with the right tools and a well-thought-out information goal in mind, it is well worth the effort.

> Companies are tracking our every online impression and click for the purpose of knowing more about our purchase habits to goad us to buy more.

that you're in the market for a new SLR camera? Did Mark Zuckerberg overhear your conversation with your spouse last weekend about your upcoming trip to the mountains? Why else would Facebook show you an ad for a Colorado ski rental package?

Companies are tracking our every online impression and click for the purpose of knowing more about our purchase habits to goad us to buy more. Your association may or may not offer products for purchase, but you probably have events you'd like your members to attend, publications you hope they read and programs in which you want their participation.

Why data matters

A discussion about data and Web analytics could take hours. In short, data analysis can help your association see trends in:

- Membership renewals
- Resource usage
- Event attendance
- Publication readership
- Membership satisfaction

There are two main types: quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative data can be counted or verified numerically. Think prices, contest entries, circulation numbers, even phone numbers. Qualitative data is everything else—the companies your members work for, opinions about your conference or comments left on a blog. Here, we'll focus on quantitative data collection.

How can you collect more meaningful data?

Start with the data you already have and actively monitor. For most associations, this will include membership demographics and membership activity, such as renewals or event attendance. Take a closer look at your members: Who are they? What types of organizations do they work for? How long have they been members? Where do they live?

Look at your events, publications and programs, and then determine how you can glean more data from these items. Are you asking for feedback after events? Do you have a way to monitor online readership?

Do you survey your members about their association-related experiences?

Next, think about some "why?" questions you want to answer, and how the data you already have might help you answer those questions. For example:

- Why do we not have more members attend our monthly meetings? (Do they live too far to make the drive every month?)
- Why are most of our members from nonprofits? (Are the corporate dues a little high?)
- Why did our last newsletter perform so well? (Did that controversial article about industry legislation stir up new readers?)

Once you figure out what you want to know, it becomes easier to find a way to collect the information needed.

We often use common Web metrics such as number of opens, clicks, forwards/shares and un-subscribes from newsletters and e-zines to glean information about reader satisfaction with our client publications. One national association wanted to increase the percentage of its membership who read its biweekly e-newsletter. We examined the number of opens compared to content type over the past few months but didn't find a consistent trend. Then we realized that constantly changing the length of the e-newsletter resulted in slightly more opens than during periods when the number of articles remained constant.

Now, this association keeps members tuned in to its e-newsletter by continually changing how heavy/light it is.

Another association wanted to know how to quickly attract readers to its new e-newsletter. After trying out a few types of columns over several months, a glance back at the number of clicks revealed that the section about case studies garnered five times as many clicks as other sections. That column is here to stay, and is placed in the middle of the newsletter in an effort to encourage readers to peruse the other content as well.

A third association wanted to increase visits and time spent on its buyers' guide. After a short survey about how members use the guide, we discovered they didn't use it much because they didn't know how it worked. We sent a series of emails to members explaining one site feature at a time, and we made sure the guide was accessible via the association website and through links in other association publications. Visits to the guide more than doubled, and time spent on the site increased 30 percent.

What results can you expect?

Collecting and combing through data can be daunting. But there are many benefits to the quality of your programs and your membership value from conducting a continual data analysis:

- Better membership value. The more you know about which programs, events and association benefits your members enjoy and use the most, the better you can focus on improving those items further.
- Less waste. On the flip side, once you know which programs your members aren't interested in supporting, which events they don't attend (or don't enjoy attending) and which benefits they don't care about, you can scale back or cut those items out completely, which will probably save your association time and money.
- Accurate attribution. When you can trace a change in revenue or membership activity back to specific advertising or changes in how a program was run, you will know exactly which efforts benefit your association and which ones don't.
- Increased use of publications. Data about circulation, email opens, website visits, clicks and time spent on a digital publication can show you which publications your members truly value and which ones they don't waste their time on. Use quantitative digital data to tweak the frequency, format and accessibility of your publications. Use qualitative data from surveys, focus groups and word-of-mouth to adjust the content and purpose of your periodicals. Let your members know you are continually responding to their information needs, and watch their interaction with your publications swell.
- Easier introduction/adoption of new ideas. If you know which topics interest your members and which method of delivery is going to encourage them to take action, you can use this knowledge to introduce parallel products and ideas. People are much more receptive to new things when those messages come wrapped in something familiar. This is why Facebook shows us ads for products or organizations our friends like: We're more likely going to look favorably upon a brand if we know our best friend 'likes' it. This is also why Pinterest is more successful at referrals than other social media platforms: That pad Thai recipe may indeed look delicious on its own, but the fact that your culinary-inclined sister-in-law pinned it is what's really convincing you to make it for dinner tonight.

The more you know your members, the better you can tailor your offerings to their specific needs, wants and delivery preferences.

The more you know your members, the better you can tailor your offerings to their specific needs, wants and delivery preferences.

Kelly Donovan Clark is an online marketing specialist with Naylor, LLC.

HACKING FOR YOUR MISSION

One Georgia association uses an event model commonly found in the tech world to foster networking and community improvement among its members.

BY LOWELL PRATT

IT ALL STARTED in 1975 in a garage in Silicon Valley, with a group of electronics enthusiasts and technically-minded hobbyists who gathered to build and experiment with computers. The group was called “Homebrew,” and out of its ranks emerged several very high-profile hackers and computer entrepreneurs, including the founders of Apple.

Small, informal gatherings like Homebrew provided an avenue to technology enthusiasts for exploring brand new technologies and creating new products, devices, and software and over the years they’ve evolved into what many in the tech community refer to as hackathons.

As one of the nation’s largest state trade associations dedicated to technology, **The Technology Association of Georgia (TAG)** is always looking for innovative ways to promote technology, while also helping our more than 26,000 members make a difference in their communities. We have found that one of the most effective ways to do this is through hackathons.

Set up as short-interval, marathon-style competitive networking events for the coding and technology communities, people with a wide range of skills come together, form teams, and work on projects called “challenges.” Web designers, developers, students, entrepreneurs, engaged citizens and sponsors collaborate to solve problems and present solutions by an established deadline.

Helping solve real problems in an efficient and expeditious manner, hackathons allow you to foster expertise and support that are often lacking within many organizations. These solutions can have a wide range of benefits from workforce development to operational improvements to research and development opportunities.

They are also a great (and free) way to find expertise or support and establish essential connections for future projects. Hosting a hackathon often helps organizations build stronger relationships with the corporate community.

More than anything, hackathons are fun events for networking and meeting allies interested in supporting your cause. Hosting a hackathon can help your organization recruit new talent, encourage diversity and expand your outreach to new people.

Hackathons are also a great way for technologists to improve their skills and meet interesting new people. In fact, what often motivates most developers to participate is the opportunity to build projects that they care about. They enjoy the collaborative environment and the chance to gain the respect of their peers.

There are three basic types of hackathons that TAG offers for our members:

- **Commercial/Enterprise Hackathons**

These events are focused on developing new ideas and finding solutions that help a commercial enterprise. The goals for these events are often to drive internal innovation, develop new products or encourage creative problem solving.

In October 2014, TAG worked with **Global Payments**, one of the largest worldwide providers of payment solutions, in hosting Financial Application hackathons in Atlanta and Barcelona in collaboration with CaixaBank.

Dubbed the **FinApps Party**, the event attracted 42 talented developers, designers and programmers of mobile payments apps that competed in teams for cash prizes of over $60,000 USD.

These teams developed innovative ideas for new mobile payment and financial service applications that operate on wearable technology.

- **Civic Hackathons**

Civic hacking refers to activities that leverage technology to solve critical issues in our communities as well as local, state and federal government.

Building apps that help educate about or solve civic problems and working with open government data are all activities that can occur under this type of hackathon event.

- **Social Good Hackathons**

Events focused on developing new ideas and finding solutions that help a community or non-profit organization or endeavor.

Hackathons can do a lot for non-profit groups by helping them to think differently about the utility of technology. They can also serve as a bridge for connecting these organizations with for-profit enterprises that help them extend their reach and propel their mission.

TAG has experienced firsthand the tremendous benefits that hackathons can bring to non-profits. Last year, TAG developed two social good hackathons:

Hackathons can do a lot for non-profit groups by helping them to think differently about the utility of technology. They can also serve as a bridge for connecting these organizations with for-profit enterprises that help them extend their reach and propel their mission.

National Day of Civic Hacking Atlanta

TAG in partnership with Code for Atlanta, followed its Day of Service activities with the National Day of Civic Hacking on May 31, 2014. The event was one of over 100 events that took place throughout the U.S. as part of the National Day of Civic Hacking.

The Atlanta event took place at the Atlanta Community Food Bank (ACFB) and brought together software developers, computer scientists, entrepreneurs, citizens, and food bank staff.

Nearly 90 attendees showed up over the two-day event, forming 13 competitive teams. The Hackathon projects revolved around food security and sustainability issues, with a focus on technical needs of the host, ACFB.

The winner of the Atlanta Hackathon challenge was Team Foogle. Foogle, a portal site, hosts websites for over 600 member agencies that the ACFB serves. The user simply inputs a zip code and agencies within their vicinity appear. To view the preliminary Foogle Website please visit foogle.herokuapp.com.

National Hack-Back Invitational

Hack-Back Invitational is a unique event initiated by TAG, whereby teams of hackers are invited to develop mobility solutions for national based non-profits in a competition for $30,000 in cash prizes.

Teams of programmers, developers and coders were invited to compete in the event while helping to give (hack) back to three of the nation's leading non-profit organizations: American Cancer Society, Boys & Girls Clubs of America, and Points of Light.

The idea for the Hack-Back Invitational came out of TAG's Georgia Awareness Task Force under the leadership of Mike Neumeier, Principal of the Arketi Group and Workgroup Leader Bryson Koehler, VP and CIO at the Weather Company.

The idea was to create an event that showcased Georgia's vibrant mobile technology sector to industry talent while making a significant impact to society.

Georgia is not only a major center for mobility innovation, but a number of national non-profit organizations are based here too. The Hack-Back event brought out the best in both areas and we look for next year's event to be bigger than ever.

Currently, TAG is engaged in developing a new program to assist our more than 2000 members of technology-based and technology-enabled companies and the broader technology community in Georgia. The initiative will provide roadmap assistance for companies and organizations interested in hosting a hackathon. TAG can help these organizations with strategy, marketing and execution to achieve the goals they identify for their events.

Through this innovative hackathon model, TAG will be able to help organizations ranging from large enterprises to small non-profits find innovative solutions and discover new opportunities.

Lowell Pratt is the Director of Executive Engagement at the Technology Association of Georgia. You can reach him at Lowell@tagonline.org or learn more about TAG by visiting www.tagonline.org.

Meet us in Charleston

2015 GSAE ANNUAL MEETING

May 27-29 in Charleston, South Carolina

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- Silent Auction & Sponsor Lounge.
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Visit **GSAE.ORG** to register today.

GSAE Presents Annual Awards

GSAE'S ANNUAL AWARDS were presented during our holiday luncheon December 10 at the Georgia Aquarium. "Our award recipients this year are being recognized for their significant contributions to the success of the society. Each has given their time, energy and talent to support GSAE's mission and goals, and we are grateful," said Wendy Kavanagh, CAE, President.

This year's recipients include the following GSAE members:

clifford m. clarke award:

Gabriel Eckert, CAE, Executive Director, Building Owners and Managers Association of Georgia. The Cliff Clarke Award is GSAE's highest level of recognition and is given to the association executive in Georgia who has demonstrated exemplary personal leadership and service to his or her own association, the association community and the general community.

corporate member representative award:

Peggy Seigler, MPA, CDME, Vice President of Sales and Marketing, Augusta Convention & Visitors Bureau. GSAE's Corporate Member Representative of the Year Award is presented to a corporate member who has demonstrated outstanding and continuous service to, involvement with and support of the association community in Georgia, and of GSAE and the GSAE Foundation.

sharon hunt emerging leader award:

LeeAnne Minnick, Director of Member Services & Technology, SAIS. The award is named in honor of past president Sharon Hunt, CAE, to recognize her contributions to our industry, especially in the areas of mentorship and education. It is presented annually by GSAE to an association executive with less than ten years of experience who demonstrates leadership through service to GSAE, their own association and to their community.

chair's award:

Jeff Sabourin, National Account Executive, PRG Atlanta. The Chair's Award is presented to the member whom the president feels has made the most outstanding contribution to the Society, advancing the aims, ideals and standards of GSAE and association management.

alan r. johnson award:

Ragan Cohn, CAE, Vice President, National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants. The Alan R. Johnson Award, established in 1994 and named in memory of a past chair of the GSAE Foundation, is presented in honor of a member who exhibits the ability to influence others by modeling positive behavior, gaining cooperation from others and fostering creativity and innovative thinking.

the stephen styron award:

Amy Kane, Director, Core Programs, Rheumatology Research Foundation.

Katie Brown, Members Services & Communications Manager, Associated Builders & Contractors of Georgia.

The Stephen Styron Award is presented annually in honor of one of GSAE's past presidents. This award is given to the Shared Interest Group (SIG) or committee leaders who the current president feels have done the most outstanding job.

skelton-massey award:

David Trust, CAE, CEO, Professional Photographers of America.
Given annually in honor of two of GSAE's past presidents.

Karl Kirsch, CAE, Vice President, Meeting Expectations.

The Skelton-Massey Award recognizes the members who sponsor the most new members, strengthening GSAE in size and effectiveness.

GSAE Luncheon & Tradeshow

On November 19, GSAE members met at Georgia World Congress Center for our annual luncheon and tradeshow featuring keynote speaker, **Chuck Wade**. As the president and CEO of The Council on Alcohol and Drugs, Wade has been the state director of Drugs Don't Work in Georgia for the past 17 years.

The day also included three morning workshop options followed by the Tradeshow: a walking, talking, eating and connecting experience.

Thank You

A huge thank you goes out to our fabulous sponsors and host.

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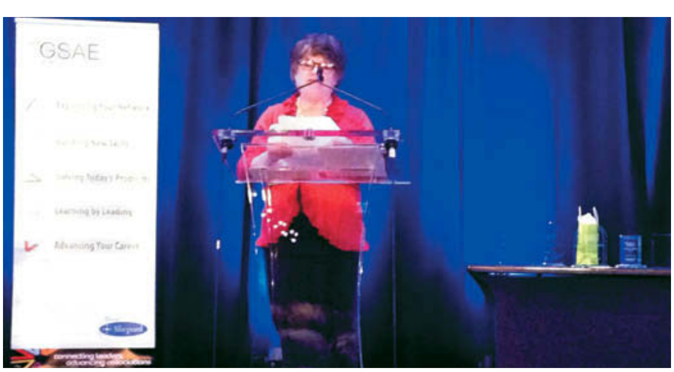
Holiday Luncheon

The 2014 GSAE Holiday Luncheon Extravaganza was held December 10, 2014 at the Georgia Aquarium in Atlanta. Thanks to the generosity of our attendees, 513 pounds of food and $55 were donated to support the work of the Atlanta Community Food Bank!

Check out highlights from the event, which featured a silent auction, awards presentation and officer installation.

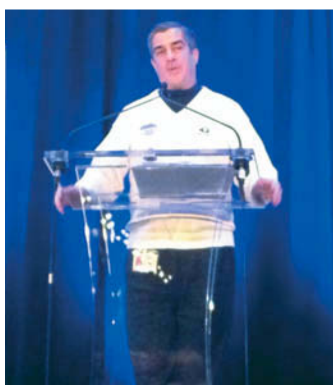










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A huge thank you goes out to our fabulous luncheon sponsors and host.

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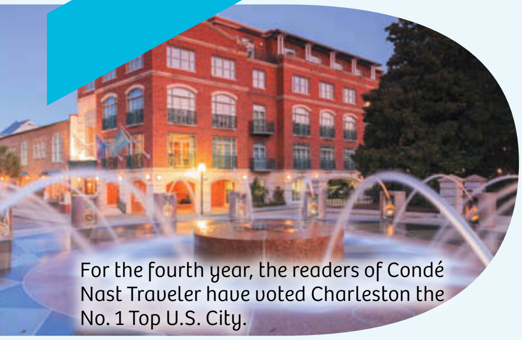


For the fourth year, the readers of Condé Nast Traveler have voted Charleston the No. 1 Top U.S. City.

Meet Charleston

Plan your next event with the host city of the 2015 GSAE Annual Meeting.

AN AWARD-WINNING, WORLD-CLASS destination, Charleston meetings have 10-15 percent more attendance on average than meetings in other locations. With an easily accessible airport, beautiful beaches, historic surroundings, highly acclaimed restaurants and shopping, your attendees will find it easy to get to, but hard to leave.

For the fourth year, the readers of Condé Nast Traveler have voted Charleston the No. 1 Top U.S. City. Known for rich history, well-preserved architecture, a celebrated restaurant community and mannerly people, Charleston also ranked No. 2 Top City in the World by Condé Nast Traveler 2014 Readers' Choice Awards.

"The people of Charleston are honored to once again be named Condé Nast Traveler's, Readers Choice No. 1 Top U.S. City," says Charleston Mayor Joseph P. Riley, Jr. "To be recognized for the fourth consecutive year is truly a testament to Charleston's vibrant culture, genuine hospitality and wonderful people, who make it such a special place to both live and visit."

Charleston first appeared on the Condé Nast Traveler Readers' Choice Top U.S. Cities in 1993 with a sixth place ranking. It achieved the No. 1 ranking in 2011 and has hung onto the top slot for four years running.

Top Golf and Beach Amenities

In addition to the No. 1 Top City ranking, Kiawah Island ranked No. 1 Top U.S. Island and the No. 2 Top Island in the World according to readers. The Sanctuary at Kiawah Island Golf Resort ranked No. 17 on the list of the Top 25 Resorts in the U.S.

"In addition to the world-class amenities that Kiawah Island Golf Resort offers, this ranking reflects the superior quality of our guest's experience. Many islands have nice amenities. What sets Kiawah Island apart is the authentic southern hospitality that our staff extends to visitors. They truly feel welcome," said Roger Warren, the president of Kiawah Island Golf Resort.

"Being named the No. 1 Top U.S. Island and No. 2 Top Island in the world speaks to Kiawah's pristine natural beauty, sensitive development, best-in-class amenities, and the overall quality of life for both residents and guests," said Chris Randolph of Kiawah Partners.

Historical Housing Options

If experiencing the historical side of the city is more in tune with your members' preferences, check out the Wentworth Mansion, which ranked No. 25 on the list of the Top 25 Hotels in the U.S. Built in 1886 as a private residence, this inn features 21 rooms and suites of unparalleled drama and beauty in the Historic District.

Nearby, the Francis Marion Hotel, which is also the host property for the 2015 GSAE Annual Meeting, features 235 guest rooms and 20,000 square feet of function space in a historical setting with unparalleled views of the city's church steeples, antebellum mansions and famous harbor. Freshly renovated in 2015, the guest rooms are elegantly appointed and feature the perfect bedding for a great night's sleep.

Also located in the heart of historic downtown, Belmond Charleston Place is Charleston's premier

Charleston boasts an easily accessible airport, beautiful beaches, historic surroundings, highly acclaimed restaurants and shopping.

Belmond Charleston Place is Charleston's premier hotel just minutes from famous homes, museums and churches.

hotel just minutes from famous homes, museums and churches. The hotel offers luxurious, newly renovated rooms and suites including The Club, private concierge level, European spa, rooftop pool, award-winning restaurants and more than 40,000 square feet of meeting space.

Varied Venues

From a state-of-the art Charleston Area Convention Center, featuring multi-purpose facilities consisting of a 200,000 sq. ft. convention center, 2,300 seat performing arts center and 14,000 seat coliseum, to the Gaillard Center, an 1,800 seat European style symphony hall with luxuriously appointed meeting and banquet space in the heart of historic Charleston, there is no shortage of unique venues built to wow your attendees.

For more information, please visit meetcharleston.com.

Top Properties

The Charleston area's 2014 Readers' Choice Award-winning properties in the Hotels/South category include:

#5 Wentworth Mansion
#9 French Quarter Inn
#16 Planters Inn
#17 Belmond Charleston Place
#19 John Rutledge House Inn
#22 Market Pavilion Hotel
#24 Restoration on King
#26 HarbourView Inn
#38 The Mills House Wyndham Grand Hotel

A Love Letter to Charleston

The Charleston Area Convention & Visitors Bureau recently released, "A Love Letter to Charleston," an original video set to the soundtrack of the Gershwin classic "Summertime." The video celebrates the No. 1 Top City ranking and showcases the qualities that make Charleston a top ranked destination for visitors around the globe. The video is available for viewing at www.charlestonly.com.

Who to Call?

Belmond Charleston Place
205 Meeting Street
Charleston, SC 29401
CharlestonPlaceMeetings.com
800-455-2427

Francis Marion Hotel
387 King St.
Charleston, SC 29403
francismarionhotel.com
843-722-0600

The Sanctuary at Kiawah Island Golf Resort
One Sanctuary Beach
Dr. Kiawah Island, SC 29455
kiawahresort.com
843-768-6040

Wentworth Mansion
149 Wenworth St.
Charleston, SC 29401
wentworthmansion.com
843-853-1886

THE DATA ARE IN?

BY JOHN P. HARRISON, CAE, CMP

YOU REMEMBER THE old joke: a kid from the sticks goes off to college and comes back home to visit. His proud father puts him in front of a crowd and says, "son, tell us something you learned at school." The kid ponders for a moment and says, "Pi R Square." The poor father winces, "oh, son, everybody knows pie are round. Cornbread are square." Thus, we begin our contemplation of data. Are data plural or is data singular, and—except for the handful of philologists left on the planet (one of whom I am not) who fight over such things—can that rather silly argument actually help us understand what data is all about?

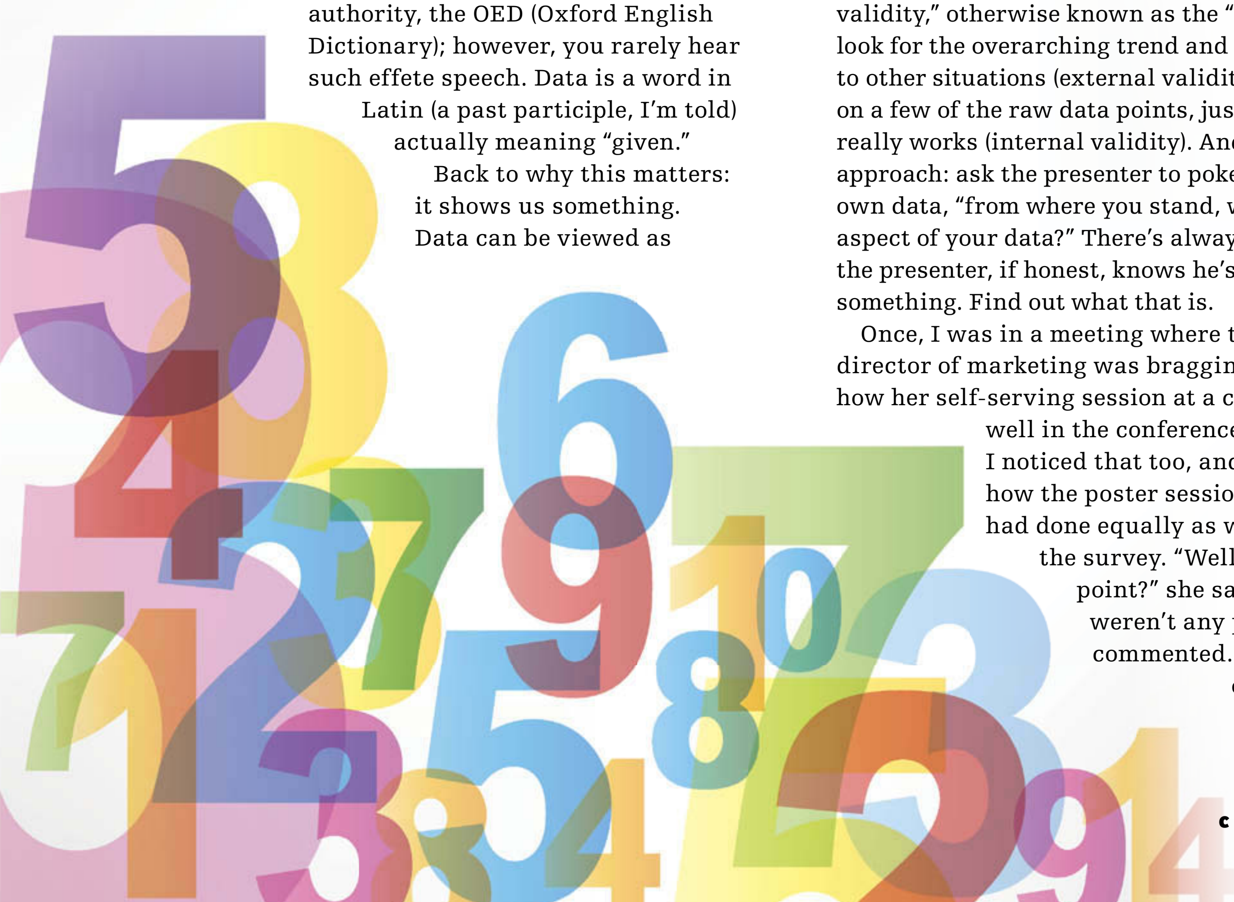
First, a quick attempt to get to the "right" answer on singular vs plural on data. The answer is yes. Sometimes data should be a singular noun referring to collected points of information in the abstract, a so-called non-count noun (like "hair"), or it can be used in its plural (like the count noun "hairs") to refer to a certain bunch of information points, "those particular data do not mean a thing." An individual data point could be called a datum according to the great authority, the OED (Oxford English Dictionary); however, you rarely hear such effete speech. Data is a word in Latin (a past participle, I'm told) actually meaning "given."

Back to why this matters: it shows us something. Data can be viewed as something we collect in the field or something we generate in an experiment—both for the purpose of gaining knowledge. Sometimes, we examine the data, not to find out something new, but to prove our hunches or points of view. Thus, our motive is important: are we trying to learn something looking at the data, or are we trying to prove something?

This brings us to statistics, which is (or is it which are?) a system of analyzing data with the hope of making some determination. Statistics depends in large part on convention; like accounting, it makes lots of assumptions about norms and makes up its own rules. For example, let's imagine an elderly couple. The wife is in superb health. The husband is dead. From those data and our good use of statistics, we can say that on average as a couple, they're in mediocre health. If you didn't know the full story on the couple, the data can slip right by unquestioned.

Always question the data. Here are but a few quick checks and a couple of examples. First, check the "face validity," otherwise known as the "smell test." Secondly, look for the overarching trend and if this is applicable to other situations (external validity). Thirdly, check up on a few of the raw data points, just to see if the math really works (internal validity). And, here's a qualitative approach: ask the presenter to poke a hole in his or her own data, "from where you stand, what is the weakest aspect of your data?" There's always a weakness, and the presenter, if honest, knows he's *almost* hiding something. Find out what that is.

Once, I was in a meeting where the association's director of marketing was bragging on and on about how her self-serving session at a conference scored so well in the conference's follow up survey. I noticed that too, and I also noticed how the poster session at the conference had done equally as well according to the survey. "Well, yes, what's your point?" she said. "There actually weren't any poster sessions," I commented. The face validity of the much-touted survey then went down the tubes.



Good data is a good thing. Understanding what the data say, if anything, is even better.

Most casual follow-up surveys (i.e., those where the survey is distributed to everyone, and some respond back, but most do not) have no real statistical validity. This is because only the folks who really have a strong opinion are the ones who respond. Those of us who don't have time or have no strong opinion—presumably a substantial portion—don't respond to such surveys. All of our data are missed. To be statistically valid, a survey has to be taken from a sufficient random sample drawn from the population.

It's not a huge undertaking, just an extra step or two—but well worth it to provide good data.

I've learned that presenting survey results—even statistically valid ones—to a committee can be a tricky business. I used to present the whole survey results, the numerical data and the comments, to groups all at once, but noticed something odd going on. The members of the committee would go right to the comments section like rubberneckers at a car wreck, overlooking the valid numbers, and honing in on some quirky comment. I've seen this happen even with groups of scientists and numbers people. I once managed an association that had an annual meeting of over 8,000. Our follow-up survey was thorough, and the numbers indicated that no one was interested in whether we offered a particular special amenity at the conference; however, one responder asked for it in the comments section. The board honed in on that one comment, and we ended up spending thousands of dollars for a couple of years providing the unused service until we finally discontinued it. Nowadays, I always provide the numerical data from a survey first without the comments attached. Later I provide the comments well after we've digested the numbers, and then only in compiled form (how many said this, and how many said that). The one-off comments then lose their undue attraction.

Good data is a good thing. Understanding what the data say, if anything, is even better.

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Whether it's an important corporate meeting, an elaborate celebration or a social gathering, Edgar's Hospitality Group offers spectacular venues augmented by skilled event-planning professionals to create experiences that will exceed your expectations.

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