

7. How does the association explain the value of membership in terms of return on investment?
8. Could I have sample copies of the last three newsletters so that I can determine whether the association's emphasis is relevant to my own professional work situation?
9. How do I qualify for professional status? What credentials does the association offer? How do I maintain my qualifications?

Once design professionals choose to join a professional association, they are likely to continue to retain their membership. About 25 percent of first-year members will choose to drop out, but thereafter membership retention is normally around 92 percent. Still, each design professional retains the choice of whether to continue to be a member of the association. To ensure that the association is accountable to their needs, members should assess the quality of communications from the leadership to members, from the association to the public, and between the staff and the members. Such communication plans, often in place within the association, are crucial because, without them, associations flop around without strategic continuity from year to year. Without continuity, the association creates needless inefficiency, waste, and inconsistent service. Members quickly see the difference.

THE VALUE PROPOSITION

Members of professional associations have a responsibility to assess the value of their associations on an ongoing basis. Continuing assessment not only keeps the organization relevant and accountable to the association but contributes as well to the legacy of the profession.

In general, the interior design associations have played a positive role in the advancement of the profession of interior design and those affiliated with the profession. Still, there are fragmented constituencies, and much progress needs to be made before today's associations reach their potential. There is a trend toward collaboration with other design associations, and this trend should produce a sharper edge—and more relevant services for the future.

Each of the associations in its own style has opened up to candid conversations with both insiders and outsiders about its future vision and viability. The associations understand that it is vital to get outside the charmed circle, which is often to some degree blinded by self-interest. (It is hard for an association to save itself from the inside alone.) Therefore, new and youthful membership, young associate and outside board members, and ongoing perspectives from surveys help to keep the associations fresh, strong, and relevant.

Interior design organizations of the future will develop strengths in both their knowledge capital and their social capital. One without the other will produce an imbalance and a missed opportunity. Each day the associations are moving one way or the other. They are more relevant—or less. They are faster—or slower. They are soulful—or shallow. They are collaborative—or they may seek short-term wins regardless of what is right for the longer term. In sum, they are smart—or they are not. It is the collective wisdom, therefore, of the design associations that provides the fuel for future relevancy, strategic development, and service growth benefiting the profession.

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