Forward

The American Engagement Index (AEI) is a companion study developed from the landmark Global Engagement Index (GEI) released in 2016. The impetus for the creation of the Engagement Index was how little is understood about improving “engagement,” how little data exists on what is healthy engagement and what is not, and what precisely is needed to close the enthusiasm gap between customers/members and associations.

Once again, MCI partnered with FairControl to launch the American Engagement Index (AEI) to measure the performance, relationship strength, and outcome of engagement tactics as seen through the eyes of association members and non-member customers in the US. The data from thousands of respondents was used to create benchmark performance scores against ten leading association brands across multiple sectors.

MCI is grateful to these ten associations for their desire to join us on the first American Engagement Index (AEI).

- American Counseling Association
- American Welding Society
- APICS
- ASIS International
- American Society of Mechanical Engineers
- Fabricators & Manufacturers Association International
- Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers
- American Institute of Chemical Engineers
- International Society of Automation
- NACE International

This collaboration has helped these association partners gain valuable private indepth analyses and insights as to how their domestic members and non-member customers perceive their value, relevance, and engagement efforts in relation to what drives the strength (or the weakness) of their relationships. In addition, we were able to produce a report on the “public findings” with recommendations that can be applicable for the entire association community.

After reading this report, if you would like to learn how your association can join our collaboration for next year’s second edition of the Global Engagement Index (GEI), please follow the instructions at the end of the report.

MCI and FairControl look forward to sharing the results of the AEI2017 and will continue to work together with Associations to further study relationship strength and how to activate engagement.

Nikki Walker
Global Vice President,
Association Management & Consulting
MCI Group
AMERICAN ENGAGEMENT INDEX 2017

A Guide to Domestic Engagement Strategies

Introduction

The 21st-century American association faces a host of serious engagement challenges. Membership at many organizations has stagnated or decreased as professionals find the products, services, and experiences they seek elsewhere. Increasing competition from related nonprofits and corporations siphons off dollars that normally would have flowed to the association. Members look for personalized, high-touch relationships that associations aren’t well-equipped to deliver, and the variety of platforms that members use (and expect an association to use) has only increased. In short, the familiar association business model—membership dollars topped off with nondues revenue from education, networking, and publications—is increasingly obsolete.

And yet, there is little research in the association community about the structure of an effective new engagement model for US American members and non-member customers.

• How strong are US member relationships in different segments, and how well do they compare to non-US members?
• How do exposure and usage of actual products and services correlate with the quality of the relationship?
• How do member relationships evolve in the membership lifecycle?
• How can real membership advocates be identified?
• What are relevant drivers that most impact engagement?
• Which qualities and motives for membership need to be considered in order to implement more targeted activation and communication strategies?

The AEI is designed to answer those questions. The Index gives participating associations deep insight into how members and non-member customers rate association performance, assess their relative relationship strength, identify critical value drivers that most impact relationships, view contrasting similarities or differences in member experience, and prefer different relevant product/services that can improve retention or increase loyalty.
The AEI is an index for assessing the US market which measures members, and non-member customers’ survey responses and distills this data into a single score which measures an association’s relationship strength across various attributes and is compared to relevant benchmark scores.

Figure 2
American Engagement Index – Definition
The Index is based on member and customer ratings on three dimensions: PERFORMANCE, BENEFIT, and PREFERENCE.
To do so, the AEI studied US member and non-member customer experiences of ten associations across their overall perceptions, product/service offerings, member benefits and value, customer service, and communications channels. To accomplish this, MCI partnered with the German-based global marketing research firm FairControl. More than 87,000 members and customers of ten US associations were invited to share how they rated their association’s overall performance, its benefit and value, and preference for it over other comparable providers.

The AEI uses a model similar to the GEI that MCI launched with 15 associations in 2016, also in cooperation with FairControl.

With the completion of Indexes for both US (AEI2017) and non-US (GEI2016) members and non-member customers, the association management community has a first-ever engagement analysis of all members and non-member customers at home and abroad. Together the GEI 2016 and the AEI 2017 represent our first steps in an ongoing process to continue to benchmark over time associations’ engagement effectiveness and changes made to activation strategy in order to improve scoring. With the launch of our second edition of GEI in 2018, we shall begin to test how these scores change over time to get to the heart of how somebody truly engages with an association’s value proposition.

Is a member who doesn’t purchase a product a drag on the overall success of the association?

Such a question is important because the results of the AEI reveal that there’s lots of work to do.

The overall AEI engagement score across all associations was a 75, signaling a borderline weak engagement. Such a score reveals two important considerations: something important is missing in the US member and customer experience, and that this experience and relationship quality appears to be no different among other mature markets (e.g. Europe) while it is much better in emerging and developing markets.

![Relationship Strength in the US Versus International Benchmarks](image-url)
A substantial portion of AEI respondents claim very weak engagement (directly impacting the quality of the relationship). The more products a member or customer purchases, the higher the engagement level, but US associations often struggle to generate awareness about their offerings. Audiences at different points in their membership relationship lifespan have different product needs and different preferences in terms of how they’re hearing about them.

The detailed analysis of member and non-member customer behavior comprises a five-level “Typology of Engagement” according to one’s relationship strength from “passives”—those disengaged with the association or even serving as its vocal detractors—to “multipliers”—those most highly satisfied with the association and encouraging others to engage with it (see Figure 4):

1. Passive—a prospect or potential customer, or a “pure member” who pays dues but is otherwise uninvolved or disengaged with the association.
2. Open—a person who has interest in the association’s products, services, and member benefits, but has not purchased a product or has participated only in a limited fashion.
3. Active—someone who is engaging with the association with purchasing and using a single product, such as attending a meeting or purchasing a product.
4. Loyal—someone who repeatedly interacts with the association and purchases/uses its products and services on a regular basis.
5. Multiplier—a strong promoter and supporter of the association who eagerly brings others into the fold who buys even more products than those in the loyal segment.

To construct this “Typology of Engagement”, three variables are used: the engagement index score (relationship strength), the net promoter score, and the number of products/services bought in the past 18 months.

**FIGURE 4**

Typology of Engagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PASSIVE</th>
<th>OPEN</th>
<th>ACTIVE</th>
<th>LOYAL</th>
<th>MULTIPLIER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AEI Total sample</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEI Global</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEI mature markets</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: n= 3776 // 8537 / 3288
Among the other points of concern this report explores:

1. Passive members—there are more of them in the US than globally and they are eroding an association’s relationship strength. They can be found across the entire member and customer base. The pressure is on for associations to address the passivity problem across the membership lifespan.

2. Heavy product usage correlates strongly to relationship strength, and a lack of usage can be a function of both disinterest in the product—not seeing value in it—and simply not being aware of its existence.

3. Longer-tenured members are looking for ways to engage with their association, but that urge is often not taken advantage of by the association or channeled in a direction that the member might value.

4. Engaged members and customers are looking for value not just in terms of the quality of products delivered, but in terms of their ability to directly address their own professional concerns.

The AEI shows that there’s plenty of room for improvement, but simultaneously a great basis to further increase member engagement. US long-term members and customers tend to have the largest segments of least engaged and passive members as well as the most active and passionately committed members. The latter express a stronger interest in volunteering on behalf of an association, signaling a potentially untapped market of supporters. As this report shows, there are plenty of opportunities for associations to better connect with less-engaged members and better support the products that activate engagement.

Methodology

The American Engagement Index is based on an online survey of the US members and non-member customers of ten associations, conducted in May 2017. FairControl delivered an invitation email and two follow-up emails to 87,109 people. The AEI is based on 3,881 respondents—a response rate of 4.6 percent, consistent with similar surveys of the association community.

The majority of respondents (77 percent) are individual members, with nine percent corporate members and 17 percent non-member customers. Respondents hail from across the United States, with the largest proportion from the South (32 percent) and the smallest from the Northeast (17 percent). The average age of respondents is 50.6 years, with an average tenure of relationship with their association of 15.8 years. The response pool is highly educated, with 74 percent possessing a bachelor’s degree or higher, and is also heavily male (80 percent).

Participating associations in the 2017 AEI:

- American Counseling Association
- American Institute of Chemical Engineers
- American Society of Mechanical Engineers
- American Welding Society
- APICS
- ASIS International
- Fabricators & Manufacturers Association International
- Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers
- International Society of Automation
- NACE International
Key Findings

Link between Relationship Strength and Engagement Effectiveness

As we indicated earlier, overall engagement at US associations rests on the edge between moderate and weak: 75. Even the strongest associations struggle; the top-ranked association scored 89, firmly in the moderate range, with the poorest-scoring association at 63 well into the weak range.

In some regards, this showing isn’t surprising as in the 2016 GEI aggregate scores from mature markets (Europe, Australia/New Zealand, Hong Kong, Japan, and South Korea)—scored a comparable 78. In those mature markets, as in the US, more intense marketplace competition provides other opportunities for education, networking, and professional growth, which puts more pressure on associations in those places to deliver an effective value proposition.

As such, in areas where members and non-member customers are investing in their relationship with their association—that is, purchasing more of its products and services—engagement is deeper. Scores for non-member customers (74) and members who’ve purchased products in the past 18 months (78) are substantially higher than that of those members who’ve made no purchases—an alarming score of 44.

That disengagement is problematic on two fronts. First and more clearly, it signifies a lost revenue opportunity for the association. Secondly, those unengaged members are also much more likely to serve as detractors for the association, eroding engagement among others who might otherwise engage more closely with it, or standing in the way of some from engaging at all.

That level of disengagement is noteworthy particularly in the US market: The share of respondents with a “very weak” relationship with their association in the AEI is 15 percent—compared to ten percent of those in the mature-market segment of the GEI. Product usage—or, rather, the lack of it—correlates strongly to this weakness. Seventy-four percent of members who had not purchased a product have a weak or very weak relationship with the association. Product purchases are not the only factor when it comes to relationship weakness, but it is the one that announces itself with the most urgency.
Simply put, the more products a member or non-member customer uses, the higher that person’s engagement with an association. Those who purchased five or more products scored 96 on the AEI, while those who purchased only one product scored 64. That correlation is roughly similar to findings in the GEI.

**FIGURE 6**
Relationship Strength in the US Versus International Benchmarks

**FIGURE 7**
Relationship Strength by Number of Products/Services Used in the Past 18 Months

Base: n= 3881 // 3355 / 394 / 132 // 8580 / 3293

Index ranges from -50 to +150
This appears to be an obvious correlation; if you like an association's products, you are more likely to purchase more of them, and thus more likely to see more value in an association overall. But the AEI also reveals a critical source of weakness when it comes to products: simple awareness of what an association is offering. Many associations may be missing a connection with members and non-member customers not necessarily for having the wrong product, or a bad one, but one they haven’t communicated well about. For instance, only 59 percent of “inactives”—those who haven’t purchased a product or service in the past 18 months—claim familiarity with an association’s offerings.

And what products do they want? Unlike the GEI, which revealed a strong interest in certification, American members and customers tend to gravitate to broader forms of engagement: magazines and newsletters (36 percent), standards and codes (33 percent), meetings and conferences (28 percent), and peer-reviewed publications (25 percent).

**FIGURE 9**
Usage of Products and Services in Past 18 Months (US American Members and Non-Member Customers)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product/Service</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Editorial Magazines/Newsletters (Print or Digital)</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standards, codes or professional guidance and good practices</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Association Journal(s) or other publications (peer-reviewed) (Print or Digital)</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certifications or accreditations</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online library/information databases</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Webinars (LIVE or on demand) presentations</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other publications, whitepapers, etc.</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online networking (social media/online communities)</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online education programs</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor led (face to face) training</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Services and Information</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research &amp; Benchmark Statistics</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home-study programs (print/DVD/online)</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry Tours</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workforce Development and Recruiting</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarships</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other product/service</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No product or service used/purchased</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question: B.3 And which products or services from ASSOCIATION have you used within the last 18 months? (Multiple responses possible)
Base: n = 3880
Relationship Lifecycles—A Threat and Opportunity

The AEI shows that engagement among members erodes over time—from a score of 82 for those in their first two years of membership to a weak score of 73 for those who’ve been members for 11 years or more. In some regards, this reflects a typical progression of a member’s lifecycle through a profession. Those early in their careers are more eager to establish relationships (such as through education and meetings), gain knowledge (via training, credentialing, and certification), and better understand their industry and opportunities within it (via publications and websites). Data shows that interest in products like standards, meetings, and publications increases over the first ten years of membership before plateauing. Face-to-face training and certifications, however, tend to decline steadily across a member’s tenure.

**FIGURE 10**

Relationship Strength by Duration of Membership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duration of membership</th>
<th>AEI</th>
<th>ARIE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Sample AEI</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to 2 years</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5 years</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 years and more</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: n= 3881 // 445 / 426 / 487 / 1408
Index ranges from -50 to +150

**FIGURE 11**

Product Usage and Duration of Membership

Question: B.3 And which products or services from ASSOCIATION have you used within the last 18 months? (Multiple responses possible)
That progression also suggests a failure among associations to think about retention across a member’s lifespan. Disengagement over time isn’t necessarily a destiny, but it definitely presents a risk. Disengagement broadens the class of detractors that can erode overall engagement; 19 percent of long-tenured members qualify as “passive”—less involved with the association, less likely to purchase products and services, and more likely to serve as its detractors—a larger proportion of “passives” than any other group measured.

Just as important, the AEI reveals that longer-tenured members aren’t necessarily checked out of a relationship with their association. Instead, they seek more targeted and tailored methods of engagement. For instance, the percentage of members saying they’re motivated to join their association because it lets them be “part of a community of like-minded professionals/organizations” spikes over time, from 20 percent of those early in their tenure to 37 percent among members of 11 years or more.

The AEI also shows smaller upticks in interest in networking opportunities, opportunities to contribute knowledge to the field, and to support the association’s mission. Moreover, while these long-term members constitute a large proportion of “passives”, they also have a substantial proportion of “multipliers”, the vocal advocates of an association and heavy consumers of its products: 18 percent. A third of that group wants to be a part of that community of like-minded professionals and is looking to contribute content in their field.

Long-term members may be disengaged simply for want of a direct ask to contribute—or for an effort on the part of the association to learn what their interests are to make the member and product user experience more meaningful.
Besides getting membership and product relevance right, associations have an urgent need to create more opportunities to cultivate engagement through more targeted means of communication. Overall, interest in association emails taper off over time—41 percent of newer members find it useful, but only 34 percent of older ones do. Members uniformly find the association’s website more useful than email, suggesting improvements in marketing automation for a more customized, relevant web experience holds more value for members than repeated email blasts in the name of awareness.
What Makes a Multiplier?
People learn about US-based associations differently in the United States than they do elsewhere around the world. Overseas, as the GEI shows, word of mouth plays a critical role—mentors, managers, and friends share their enthusiasm for a particular association’s product or service. Word of mouth matters in the United States as well—a third of AEI respondents say they became aware of their association that way. But they are more likely to hear about it through their university or employer, which may mean that their involvement with the association has less to do with strong enthusiasm for the organization than it does with a sense of professional belonging.

As such, the lack of effective activations strategies currently generates more passive members than “multipliers” who proactively help grow the business. And there are stark differences between the two groups, not just in terms of their level of engagement but what they choose to engage with. “Passives”, for instance, are more likely to focus on well-known and widely used products: publications, meetings, certifications (if at all). “Multipliers”, however, are more likely to drill into more personalized experiences, such as online communities, online educational opportunities, career services, and more niche publications and research. This split raises two critical questions for associations that wish to increase their proportion of “multipliers”. Should all members be treated equal when it comes to benefits? And would it be better to rethink benefits according to where a person is in their professional development or business need?
Because multipliers tend to have a more granular understanding of an association’s product mix, it’s worth looking at an association’s breadth of offerings from two perspectives: awareness of the existence of offerings that correspond to individual needs, and perception of the quality of those offerings. The AEI tracks this by scoring a variety of quality items in six categories: overall perception, benefits/value, offering and customer service, communication and information, and products and services.

Breaking down the association experience this way reveals some successes and shortcomings. The AEI shows a solidly moderate score for products and services (95) and for overall perception (87), but borderline to weak in the remaining categories, with a 69 for benefits/value. This means that product value is significantly higher than member value among respondents. A closer look at what’s rated highest is revealing. Overall, members and non-member customers are looking for high-quality, relevant information delivered well. For instance, the top rated aspects in the overall perception category are subject-matter expertise, reputation, and reliability.

*Per definition, multipliers use an above-average number of products, while passives hardly use products. When taking this into consideration, specific usage patterns are revealed.*
Performance alone isn’t the key to engagement; impact is equally important. The AEI shows this via impact performance mapping (driver analysis) which correlates the rating of performance attributes with overall relationship strength (impact) — revealing that quite some products achieve positive evaluations, but do not significantly contribute to strengthen the relationship to an association.

FIGURE 17
Driver Analysis - Benefits/Value

With regards to benefits, attributes of a high personal value (“helps me achieve my personal/professional goals,” “provides me/my organization with competitive advantage,” “membership benefits/products and services correspond to my needs”) score high in terms of impact, but weakly in terms of performance.

The above attributes have proven value and are worth investing in, but aren’t implemented well by associations.
When it comes to delivering personal value that can impact engagement, it is worth remembering that even if a member gives high marks for delivering top "standards, codes or professional guidance and good practices" (PS12), unless this content somehow is packaged and delivered in a impactful product or experience, those benefits (PS12) will not contribute to improving an individual’s engagement with the association.

As Figure 19 below shows, associations’ strengths are their reputations, face-to-face trainings, annual events, and certifications and accreditations. Again, these represent the broadly appealing attributes that US members tend to gravitate toward, but the chart also reveals a number of attributes that have a high impact and that, with closer attention, can potentially become high-performing attributes as well. This implies that major areas of focus for associations surround individual relevance, such as member/customer focus, providing a competitive advantage, helping individuals to achieve goals, value for money, benefits and products/services that correspond to individual needs, and so on.
There are also clear distinctions between the attributes valued by “passives” and “multipliers”—though it should be said that “passives” tend not to see any attributes as relevant strengths. For “passives”, reputational attributes including “contributions to society,” “thought leadership,” and “member/customer focus” result as particularly urgent areas for associations to improve. Multipliers confirm the value of more product-oriented (and personally focused) attributes such as providing value for money, helping to achieve professional goals, and certifications/accreditations.

In that light, product development is the key challenge for associations: What are the quality products and experiences associations can create that will resonate with members and non-member customers, across every point of the individual’s relationship with the association? The AEI, while showing that some products have a higher impact than others, ultimately should prompt associations to consider their overall development process in the context of their understanding of member and non-member customer needs.

**Retention and Meetings**
The AEI shows that relationship strength correlates to one’s likelihood of renewing membership. Enthusiasm for renewal erodes as relationship strength weakens 90 percent of those with a very strong relationship will definitely renew, but only 11 percent of those with a very weak relationship say they will do so.

![Likelihood to Renew Membership](image)

**FIGURE 20**
Likelihood to Renew Membership

To that end, it’s perhaps unsurprising that members’ preferred motivators for renewal according to the AEI are of the “what’s in it for me?” variety: 39 percent look for a reduction in member fees, 31 percent want more local events and meetings, 29 percent want benefits more relevant to their professional niche, 28 percent want timely and relevant content, and 22 percent look at career resources. That last finding is revealing. Only nine percent of respondents overall say they use such career resources, which suggests that associations may need to increase their offering in this context and better communicate this benefit, particularly to younger and/or newer members. Members, especially passive ones, are looking for good reasons to renew, putting pressure on associations to provide the requested benefit in a way that’s more relevant to the member at that point in their career, or do a better job of directing the member’s attention to promising offerings.
Membership, as a concept, is rooted in a sense of community: Individuals join out of a need for a sense of belonging, which isn’t always strictly a matter of professional growth. And the AEI shows that meetings, as a central opportunity to take part in that community face-to-face, have a lot of value for members. That is, so long as those meetings are relatively accessible—two-thirds of respondents overall say they will attend meetings as much or more often as they have in the past. Close proximity to the event is a huge motivator; only 15 percent say they will definitely attend a meeting that requires air travel, but 35 percent definitely will if they can attend locally. That likelihood doesn’t shift much depending on whether the member or his or her employer is covering travel costs; ultimately, proximity is what’s providing value for these members.

FIGURE 21
Top 5 Benefits Encouraging Members to Renew

- Reduction in member fees 39
- More activities/events near me 31
- More member benefits applicable for my specific profession/interest 29
- More timely and relevant content in my areas of interest 28
- Access to job boards and career resources 22

Question E.20 Below you will find a list of possible benefits that could be provided by ASSOCIATION. Which of those would encourage you to renew your membership with ... for another 3 years? Base: n= 3121
Takeaways: What American Members And Non-Member Customers Are Saying

If an association is serious about improving engagement with their US base, it’s imperative to look at what drives value for members and non-member customers. The AEI shows weakness in many associations’ ability to deliver that value, but also demonstrates some clear paths for improvement.

1 Improve product design and management in order to improve the value of your offerings to members and non-member customers whose needs are constantly changing.

It is not just about how old and respected your brand is or how large your product portfolio. If members and non-member customers believe association offerings do not offer value as needs change, they will become disaffected and less accessible to outreach.

Illustrated across all respondents, the following perceptions were expressed about the association brand, associated product offerings, and member benefits:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived Strengths</th>
<th>Desired Improvements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Reputation</td>
<td>• Be more member/customer focused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Instructor led (face to face) training</td>
<td>• Provide me/my organization with competitive advantage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Annual meetings and regional/local conferences</td>
<td>• Help me achieve my personal/professional goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Certifications or accreditations</td>
<td>• Improve value for money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Make membership/product offerings correspond to my needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Improve the variety of member/product benefits</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Associations must become more member/customer focused. What do key member segments need in order to achieve their objectives? Are current offerings sufficiently aligned to deliver enough value for each key member or customer segment?

Every association should have targeted strategies for serving the needs of important member or customer segments (i.e. by membership duration, area of focus, practitioner versus academia, etc.) including marketing campaigns that are customized to each group’s needs.

The Index data shows that associations run the risk of hurting member and customer relationship strength if member and customer needs are ignored as those needs change over the lifespan of a career. What worked in the early years will not be sufficient to sustain engagement nor improve relationships. It is helpful to think about product and member experiences in a different way, to make sure that the largest member and non-member customer segments (at each stage of their relationship lifespan) find sufficient offerings to strongly reinforce the value of membership or being a customer.

This is a product development and management problem. Current offerings incorporate products and services that are suitable to meet the most basic needs, however, the driver analysis reveals that the perceived benefit:

- Is not sufficiently designed to address the needs of a significant number of members and customers.
- Is not provided to members and customers, and does not help them achieve their personal objectives
- Does not convey the competitive advantage expected
- Is not able to demonstrate “value for money” provided.
Generally speaking, the current products have the potential to be designed and promoted to convey the benefits members and non-member customers look for:

**Meetings and conferences** are a basic core offering to the membership and are a major strength of associations.

Events contribute to feeling like part of a community and offer networking opportunities. But if the offering isn’t designed sufficiently, people won’t come and end up missing out on an important aspect of community and networking. For instance, due to barriers to travel, a sufficient number of (relevant) local events is essential.

**Online offerings** (online networking, webinars, education programs) are currently rated on a rather moderate performance level but with a limited or lower relevance.

Educational offerings are expected qualities. People are looking for desired outcomes from education that match their individual needs. Online networking can support community building but requires a strategy and operational plan to make the experience relevant.

**Standards, codes or professional guidance and good practices** show a high usage rate, but only a limited value to the member or customer.

Standards are a basic expectation and decisive factor for becoming a member as they can help members increase their knowledge. This could mean that better marketing to convey how they can be applied for specific outcomes would be helpful.

**Certifications or accreditations** are a key driver of engagement and relevant strength although more so for early entrants in the field or membership.

Certifications can be particularly helpful for recent members to become more valuable for their employers. Marketing campaigns and lead generation must focus on cultivating the right customers for these products.

**Magazines, publications and information data bases** (Editorial Magazines/Newsletters, Association Journal, other publications, online library) are used frequently, however, performance ratings are mixed and relevance is rather low.

This product category provides access to essential resources and helps members stay current with regards to trends.
The passive member is a serious threat to the health of American associations.

The AEI shows a substantial proportion of passive members at American associations, larger than association members located outside of the US. This may be related to different levels of expectations and opportunities to gain the requested benefits. Or they may have become passive because they have found member and product offerings to be less relevant over time. Whatever the reason, a weak relationship has consequences in terms of frequency of product purchases, likelihood of renewal, loyalty or willingness to sample competitive offerings, and likelihood of becoming a vocal detractor of the association. It is critical that associations look at this class of members within their organizations to find common threads that speak to their disengagement.

To illustrate, contrasting how “passives” and “multipliers” bought and used products in the last 18 months shows a strikingly different picture. If at all, “passives” bought more of the core product line in their single purchase while “multipliers” used their deeper insights of association offerings to gain access to various online and data products and services.

And finally, it is important to stress that the road to better member retention requires knowing what issues members have that places their relationship at risk with the association. Traditional marketing tactics to improve retention are less likely to make a significant impact on the views of those who show they have been more passive (not buying and using products). Changing their motivation requires steps that can improve their relationship with the association, which will require aligning unmet needs to member or product offerings.

Rethink product design across the individual’s lifespan with an association.

The AEI shows that engagement with an association strongly correlates to the purchase of products, and overall suggests that associations are better at delivering products with perceived value to newer members. Longer-tenured members consume fewer products and have higher expectations from them in terms of quality and value. But because many of the longer-tenured members say that they still look for ways to engage with their association, there appears to be a missed opportunity to deliver high-value products to that particular constituency. Just as the GEI revealed that a failure to consider local needs will hobble any association’s global efforts, American associations would do well to consider different points of the member’s professional tenure as distinct “segments” that require different value propositions.

Personalize for impact.

An association needs to consider its product mix in the context of stated member and customer needs. The effectivity of products differs across the member lifespan; newer members find value in online libraries and certifications, for instance, while long-term members find it in meetings, standards and codes, and Association Journals. The association’s goal should be to create multipliers across all groups, and recommendations from last year’s GEI apply here as well:

- Treat members who are not buying products or actively involved as “leads and prospects.”
- Members and customers who tend to renew and purchase or use some products should be activated through programs designed to build their loyalty.
- Loyal members who purchase products relatively frequently should be activated to become multipliers who can become valuable advocates to grow the association.
- Multipliers or loyals are to be treated with special care. Programs should be custom designed to maintain their passion and to identify ways to channel desire in support of the association.
Recognize that what members and customers want is often highly individual.

The AEI shows that the attributes that have the most value for a wide swath of members and customers tend to relate to individual relevance. Members and customers are looking for products and services that provide a competitive advantage, help them achieve goals, provide value for money, and correspond to individual needs, and for meeting experiences close to home. Such personalization plays a critical role in a member’s decision to renew. A close understanding of those needs, along with the capacity to respond to them—from considering more chapters to tailoring content to fit individual needs—can satisfy this demand.

Managing based on measurement must become more important.

Associations need to analyze their own customer research findings to align these findings with their business strategy, internal processes, and organizational limitations. Member and customer experience must become a key focus. Measures need to be defined and action taken to improve, for example, by following this approach:

**STEP 1:** Insight generation and needs assessment – interpreting and validating research results.

Identify focus areas by doing a results-based SWOT analysis:
- Where are the strengths of the association from a member/customer perspective? Find ways to leverage those areas.
- What are the weak points with the most urgent need for improvement? Remove dangerous weaknesses.
- What are the most promising areas for engagement increase and differentiation? Focus on opportunity areas that offer the best potential.
- Where are latent threats? Explore ways to minimize risk.

Prioritize focus areas matching existing member/customer service processes, and offer opportunities for discussions of implications for the future member/customer service strategy.

**STEP 2:** Root cause analysis – mapping member/customer service processes and product portfolio with customer experiences.

Discuss internal processes and workflows in the focus areas according to step 1 which will result in a “business mapping.”

Assess processes and portfolio by three perspectives:
- Impact from people/internal organization
- Impact from processes and tools
- Impact from communication

**STEP 3:** Develop improvement measures – define action plans, set performance targets, and manage change.

- Develop action plans for each focus area with desired outcome.
- Plan implementation with responsibilities, timeline, milestones, performance targets, and action monitoring.
Announcing the second edition of the Global Engagement Index 2018

We are accepting inquiries for associations seeking to join the next Global Engagement Index (GEI) which will begin in February 2018. MCI and FairControl are happy to provide a briefing on GEI2018 to cover:

- Fundamental questions the Index answers about your members
- What the Index can help you accomplish
- Association executive testimonials from the first edition in 2016
- Practical value from participating in the Index
- How the Index works
- Pricing options
- Project timeline

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Engagement Index Creators And Producers

About MCI
MCI is a global market development company helping associations engage and activate target audiences while building strong relationships within client communities to strengthen brands and boost performance. We offer strategy, marketing, business development, conference and education program management, and full back office capability. An independent, privately held company with headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, MCI has offices with WOFE business licenses in over 31 countries across Europe, the Americas, Asia-Pacific, India, the Middle East, and Africa, and delivers projects for clients all over the world.

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About FairControl
FairControl is a global full-service market research and advisory firm based in Munich, Germany, designing and delivering multi-layered survey instruments used to reveal individual opinions, attitudes, needs or current trends. Annually conducting over 30,000 face-to-face surveys, FairControl can create survey designs based on unique investigative goals and the target group to be surveyed.

http://www.faircontrol.com

Questions on the GEI or this report?

We welcome your feedback on the AEI2017. Please contact Peter Turner by phone at +1.571.275.1516 or by email peter.turner@mci-group.com to share your questions.
APPENDIX:

What is a Driver Analysis?

Impact-performance mapping or driver analysis combines performance ratings on a 5-point scale (5=excellent to 1=poor) with the impact as perceived by the respondent (derived from a correlation coefficient of the quality items and the engagement index).

Driver analysis allows researchers to identify how performance is rated (e.g. for such things like brand awareness, product or member offerings, customer service, or marketing and communications) as compared to the value derived by survey respondents. It’s one of the more powerful techniques we use to help prioritize findings in surveys.

Performance is displayed on the vertical axis and impact on the horizontal axis. There are four quadrants where plotted scores offer very different outcomes:

- **Upper right** – highest scores on each axis (relevant strengths: areas that associations should leverage and communicate)
- **Lower right** – high scores for value but lower scores for performance (relevant areas of improvement)
- **Upper left** – high scores for performance but lower scores for value (possible areas to reassess continued effort or changes since value to respondents is so low)
- **Lower left** – lowest scores on each axis (less important drivers which are rated below average, aspects should be monitored)

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**FIGURE A1**

Driver Analysis - Explanation of Methodology
FIGURE A2
Driver Analysis - Explanation of Methodology

Basis for Impact Performance Map: Performance Evaluation & Engagement Index

FIGURE A3
Driver Analysis - Explanation of Methodology

Basis for Impact Performance Map: Performance Evaluation & Engagement Index
FIGURE A4
Driver Analysis - Explanation of Methodology

INTERPRETATION

Fictive Example