



Move From ROI to VOI

How often have you heard a member ask, “What’s the ROI of membership?” Members who ask this question want to know, “How much are we going to save?” or “How much are we going to make (\$\$)?” or maybe it means, “What does this do to my bottom line?”

I caution associations about engaging in a ROI debate to define the value of membership. ROI literally means “return on investment” and in these debates, you would need to prove that members received the same amount of money back, or more, than they invested. Sometimes, that may be a hard thing to prove.

Rather than defining the benefits of membership using ROI, I’d prefer to explore the VOI. The VOI concept was first introduced by Gartner, the world’s leading information technology research and advisory company. VOI, or Value on Investment, is defined as *“intangible assets that contribute heavily to an organization’s performance. These intangible assets include knowledge, processes, the organizational structure, and ability to collaborate. Where ROI is the measure of the tangible benefits of a project or activity, VOI is the measure of the intangible benefits of a project or an activity. VOI includes ROI.”*

In the technology world, the ROI of buying a new VOIP (voice over Internet Protocol) phone may be when the benefits of not paying for long-distance charges exceeds the cost of the phone purchase. The VOI may include being able to receive voice mail messages left on your office land line via your smart phone as e-mails with the Wave files attached so you don’t have to call in to find out if you have any messages. Or VOI may be your increased productivity or the knowingness that a high-priority member called and you can call him right back without playing “phone tag” because you got to the message a lot later. You get the gist that VOI goes way beyond what you paid for something.

VOI Means Much More than Money

We can definitely apply the Value on Investment concept in the association world as a way to define the often overlooked and unexpected benefits of member investments. Most of the benefits of membership go way beyond monetary exchanges. Let’s expand on the VOI concept and explore the intangible benefits of membership. Let’s substitute “Investment” in VOI for other intangible words that start with “I” and explore how membership delivers value for:

- **Information**—We provide timely and relevant information our members use (e.g., newsletters, publications, blogs, updates on issues and outcomes).
- **Initiative**—On behalf of our members, we take a stand on issues and ensure that a business voice is included before decisions are made.
- **Impact**—Our initiatives create impacts that benefit our members, the business community, and industries we serve.
- **Influence**—Because we proactively monitor business issues and take actions where needed, we are seen as one of the most influential organizations in our community, state, or nationally.
- **Interaction**—We provide opportunities for members to make connections, share information, and learn best practices from a community of their peers.
- **Instruction**—We offer timely, industry-appropriate, and cost-effective educational opportunities so members can sharpen their skills, stay compliant, and compete locally and globally.
- **Insights**—Members gain valuable knowledge, best practices, and learn from other members and industry experts.
- **Integration**—Members can apply what they have gained to their own organizations to meet their goals.

As associations, we deliver on VOI, which includes both financial and intangible benefits for our members!

How Do We Communicate Our VOI?

When I peruse association websites and membership marketing collateral, it seems that much of what we want to say is “lost in translation.” We use marketing speak words and not those of our members, which means other members and prospects don’t really understand the value of membership. If you want to make sure your VOI is communicating benefits effectively, ask your members to toot the VOI horn and listen carefully to how they define the value. Consider asking members who seem to really value their membership questions that explain the VOI for them. Here are a few you could use:

- Which sources of information provided by us do you access on a regular basis and how does it benefit you or your business?
- Describe one initiative that we took a stand on and how it positively impacted your business.
- What do you like best about interacting with other members?
- How have we helped you to develop new or stronger relationships with others in the community?
- Describe something new you learned as a result of a program or other educational opportunity.
- What best practices or ideas gained from being a member have you integrated into your business or personal life?

Capture VOI statements offered by members through open-ended survey questions, blogs, social media, focus groups, interviews or by just asking the “Question of the Week.” Use members’ exact language to craft your value propositions—happy members say it best and in ways that will resonate with others. These VOI statements can be short videos on your website or on YouTube. They become your testimonials on marketing collateral. Here’s an insight I’ve developed along the way: members who question the value they are receiving ask you about their ROI and members who “get it” tell you about the VOI!

So when members question their ROI, you want to shift the conversation to what VOI they received.

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*Cathi Hight is president of Hight Performance Group and has over 20 years experience in performance improvement. She helps organizations build sustainable futures, improve processes, increase productivity, and develop staff & member loyalty. Hight Performance Group is the developer of the **Member Retention Kit**. A master facilitator, trainer and consultant, Cathi offers strategic planning, leadership and staff development, and a toolkit of publications, webinars and assessments. To learn how we can help you create VOI and communicate your value, contact Cathi at (720) 304-0747 or e-mail: cathi@hightperformance.com*