



samag
Seminars for Arts Professionals

JULY SEMINAR SUMMARY

BANKING ON LOYALTY – RUNNING A SUCCESSFUL MEMBERSHIP PROGRAM

Panel: Vyvian Wilson, SAMAG Committee member
Alana Ayde, acting members services manager, Powerhouse Museum
Christina Alvarez, members services manager, Metro Screen

Most people have enough trouble building a relationship with one person – the endless shelves of dating guides at Dymocks are testament to that.

So when arts organisations rally to build loyalty among the community, you can imagine the difficulty at stake.

Why are membership programs so important?

Essentially, members should function like a store's most loyal customers. As Christina says, "We want our members to care about us. We don't want them to sign up only to receive free or discounted services – that should be the icing on the cake for them."

Alana agrees, saying, "I've always had a strong impression that members are important in championing our organisation. When we had funding cuts, our members were very supportive and many rallied around to tell us that they'd support us in any way they could."

Members aren't merely about providing funding to an organisation – they're there to form the organisation's cultural basis. Growing membership is about generating revenue in less tangible, more important ways.

Case Study 1: Metro Screen

Members: 500

Retention rate: 30 per cent

Function: Metro Screen services screen practitioners across Australia.

Subscribers: 5300 (note: subscribers receive free weekly e-newsletters)

Metro Screen is currently undergoing a review of their membership program. Alvarez says that the program, as it stands, doesn't truly connect with the organisation. Members received substantial discounts, leading some board members to wonder if they weren't devaluing the membership program. As Alvarez says, members should be members because they feel an affinity for, and want to support, an organisation.

The Review

During the review process, Metro Screen board members thought of abolishing the membership program altogether. But, says Alvarez, they eventually realised the value of having a loyal membership base.



samag
Seminars for Arts Professionals

JULY SEMINAR SUMMARY

The New Program

The new Metro Screen membership program is similar to the previous one, but it is a lot more streamlined and can be communicated to members more easily. For example:

- Members will receive discounts, but not as substantial as those they were receiving before
- Metro Screen will promote the unique features of the program more
- Members will be invited to monthly meetings at Metro Screen to build community spirit
- The new membership program will focus on the interaction of members and Metro Screen, not just what members can receive from the program.
- Members can communicate better with each other through a social networking tool on the Metro Screen website

Case Study 2: Powerhouse Museum

Members: 17,000

Retention rate: 56 per cent

About: The Powerhouse Museum is a NSW Government-funded science and technology museum. Despite funding cuts, though, membership is booming. However, this means that membership is now increasingly relied upon for revenue.

Members at the Powerhouse Museum receive a number of benefits – free Museum entry (and entry into Sydney Observatory and the Powerhouse Discovery Centre in Castle Hill), free exhibition entry, use of the members lounge and subscription to a quarterly magazine, Powerline.

Membership at the Powerhouse is divided into several categories, defined by length (one year, two years etc) and status (single, family, concession etc).

With such a large membership base, Alana says it's important to invite feedback and listen to it. For instance, some member groups indicated that they wanted to contribute to the Museum as well as receive benefits. The museum also has a membership hotline and places a strong emphasis on customer service.

by: Lauren Smelcher