

# Association Engagement PLAYBOOK

Strategies for Retention, Renewal & Growth

e-book by:





**The more engaged your association members are, the more likely they are to renew annual memberships and refer others to your association.**





## Chapter 1

# The Engagement Challenge

Engagement, retention, renewals & growth go together for associations. The more engaged your association members are, the more likely they are to renew annual memberships and refer others to your association.

However, in an environment where attention spans are lower, older generations are leaving the workforce en masse, and competition for attention is higher than ever, associations are presented with the engagement challenge.

Associations that successfully pivot strategies, highlight their value, and engage their audience meaningfully will ultimately

grow and thrive. Those who get stuck in the past, fail to evolve, and don't deliver what their members want will struggle.

This eBook is designed to help associations discover new (and old but refreshed) ways to engage their members in ways that will not only help with membership retention, but also expansion.

Key topics covered include: an overview of the current landscape, how storytelling fits into association engagement, member-centric content, key performance indicators for associations, how print can be refreshed to engage audiences, and the role digital plays in membership engagement.

## Chapter 2

# Understanding the Association Membership Engagement Landscape

Association members don't really care about your association – we know it can be a hard pill to swallow.

Association members care about the value you bring to them. Whether it's through events, resources, training, or something else, members want to know they're benefiting from being a part of your association. Or maybe you're an association professional who is required to be a member of, and that's why they care about your association.

How can you best demonstrate the value of your association to its members? Meaningful engagement opportunities across various channels throughout the entire year.

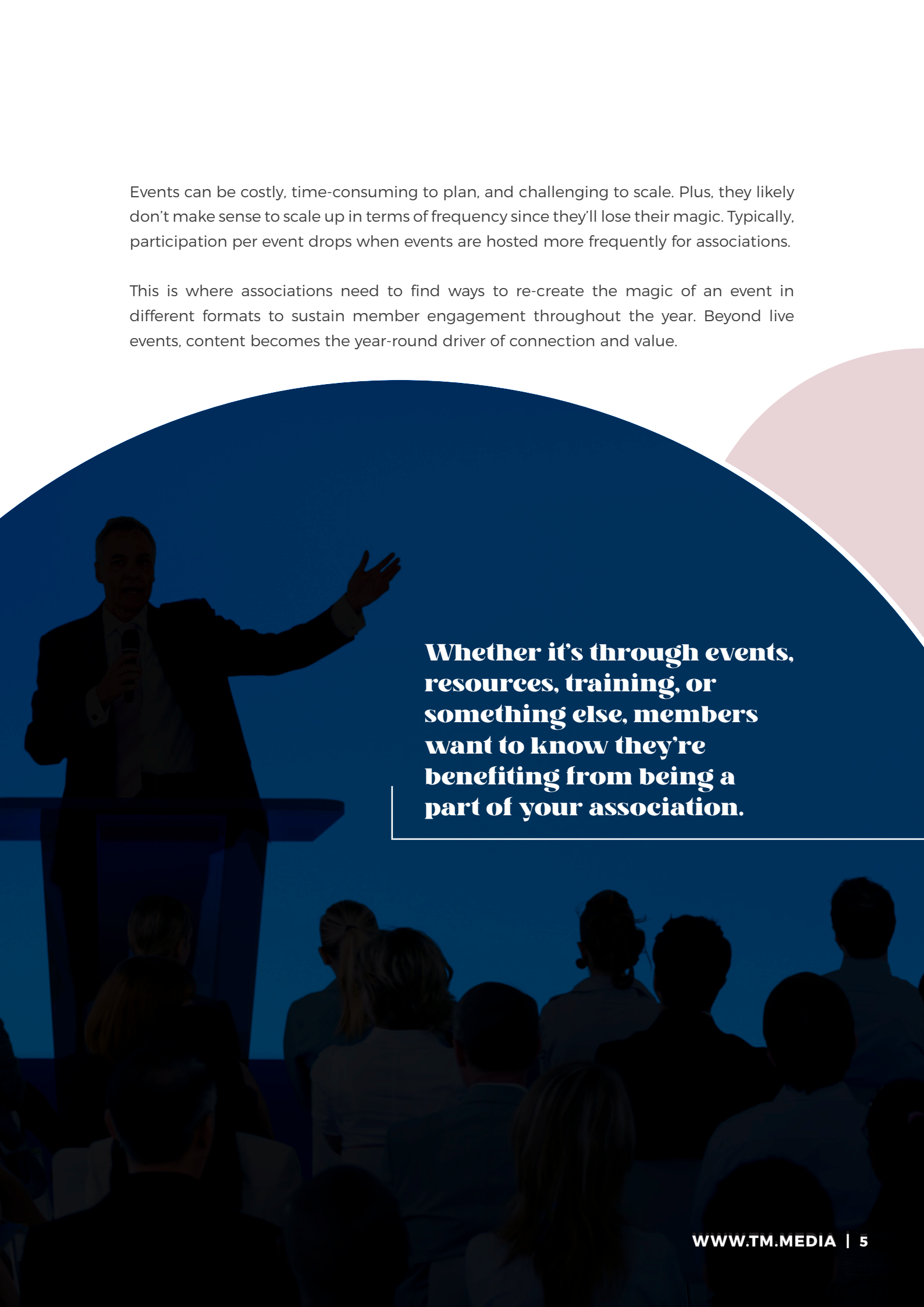
Annual conferences and events consistently rank at the top as engagement tools for associations. The reason they are so successful is that they bring together members, allow members to connect with like-minded individuals, and provide valuable access to industry resources and insights.





Events can be costly, time-consuming to plan, and challenging to scale. Plus, they likely don't make sense to scale up in terms of frequency since they'll lose their magic. Typically, participation per event drops when events are hosted more frequently for associations.

This is where associations need to find ways to re-create the magic of an event in different formats to sustain member engagement throughout the year. Beyond live events, content becomes the year-round driver of connection and value.

A man in a dark suit and light shirt stands at a podium on the left, holding a microphone and gesturing with his right hand. In the foreground, the silhouettes of an audience are visible, looking towards the speaker. The background is a dark blue gradient with a large, light blue semi-circle on the right side.

**Whether it's through events, resources, training, or something else, members want to know they're benefiting from being a part of your association.**



## Chapter 3

# The Power of Storytelling & Content

Bill Gates popularized “content is king” nearly 30 years ago, and it’s been widely repeated to this day. Why? Because it still rings true.

Engaging content produced by an association helps to attract new audiences, engage existing members, and, with the right content, re-engage members who are at risk of cancelling their membership.

So, what exactly does engaging content look like in the current landscape for associations?

Here’s what we found association members care about from speaking to real members of our Client-Partners’ associations.

1. Storytelling & community building
2. Industry updates, insights, & standards
3. Adds value

This means content should tie directly back to the key value proposition of being a member of your association.

**When creating content for an association, leaders should ask the following questions:**

- **What is the purpose of this content?**
- **Why would a member of the association care about this content?**

If the answers to these questions aren’t in alignment with your association’s mission, purpose, and promise to your members, the content should likely be scrapped.



## Case Study

# Storytelling to Increase Engagement



An insurance organization publishes a quarterly member magazine with us that is designed not just to share information, but to create connection, identity, and inspiration among its community. Its content is curated to balance member stories, wellness and financial education, and organizational updates.

## What They Do Well

### 1. Member-Centred Stories

Each issue features stories of members, their achievements, life event anecdotes, and community involvement. These human stories build emotional connection and make the content feel relevant and real.

### 2. Variety of Content Types

- Financial education & wellness pieces inform members how to make better life decisions.
- Behind-the-scenes or company news keep members aware of what's new, what the organization is up to.
- Community & lifestyle content (such as community involvement, member interest stories) balances the seriousness of financial topics, making the magazine more engaging.

### 3. Consistent Cadence & Voice

They publish quarterly, reliably. Members come to expect fresh issues on a regular

schedule, which helps build anticipation. The magazine's voice feels personal yet trustworthy; it tells stories, not just broadcasts them.

### 4. Heritage & Identity in Storytelling

They draw on their history to show evolution, values, and community legacy. This kind of storytelling reinforces belonging.

### 5. Clear Member Benefit Messaging

The magazine doesn't just entertain; it underlines what members receive by being part of the organization. The content is positioned as a member resource with educational, emotional, and community value.

## Impact / Potential Results

- Higher engagement: Members feel seen and heard; stories about peers often generate more response (emails, social media, events).
- Better retention: When members sense identity, community, and benefit, they are more likely to renew.
- More referrals or word of mouth: A magazine that members read and share becomes a marketing tool.
- Stronger brand reputation: By combining educational content with storytelling, the organization positions itself as caring, credible, and member-focused.





## Chapter 4

# Old School Tactics Refreshed

Print magazines, as a monthly or quarterly publication, have long been a popular way for associations to engage with their members. It's a tool to share necessary industry standards and regulations, as well as share feature content and community information.

In recent years, we've seen the market slowly shifting away from producing print magazines. Some associations are choosing to step away from their longstanding magazines completely, while others are decreasing the frequency of the publication or moving to digital-only.

However, the idea that print is an old-school tactic that doesn't work anymore isn't backed by numbers. In fact, a survey (ala.org) found that 47% of consumers now prefer magazines in print, up from 38% in 2021, a clear sign that interest in print is not fading but growing.

Association members still want print publications from associations with which

they hold membership. However, the content they want to see is different.

With older generations leaving the workforce, we're also seeing trends in the average age of association members being younger. The common misconception is that younger generations are less likely to engage with print – this isn't true.

In a world gone digital, folks are spending more time than ever blindly scrolling through content that doesn't stick.

**The truth is, your association members want to see print publications, but they're begging you for a content refresh!**

So, how does your association leverage the desire for print content and nostalgia to generate engagement from your association members without abandoning modern digital tactics?



## Chapter 5

# Bridging Digital & Print

Print alone isn't good enough. Digital alone isn't good enough.

**Multi-channel is the key to success. As an association, you need to be everywhere your members are.**

The most successful associations are bridging the gap between print and digital to create a strategy where each channel reinforces the other. Print provides depth, authority, and staying power, while digital offers immediacy, reach, and interactivity. When used together, they amplify engagement and make sure your members never miss the message.

Our clients have their magazine, whether it be monthly, quarterly, or annually, at the center of their communications and member engagement plans. The magazine

connects all the pieces of their strategy and acts as an ultimate resource for their members.

New procedures to follow? The magazine shares them as well as links to other resources. Upcoming event? The magazine advertises the event before and after, acts as a recap for members.

Anything your members need to know (or want to know) is housed in one place, with branches going in different directions to additional resources.

A concern some association leaders have with print is that the information will become outdated. Through your magazine content being available on both print and digital platforms, you don't need to worry about this. Sharing a procedure update or industry information that changes frequently? Use QR codes to direct readers to the most recent version of a resource.



## Case Study

# How NA Pallet Association Takes Print Content Beyond Their Magazine

The National Wooden Pallet & Container Association (NWPCA), also known as NA Pallet, has proven that a print magazine can be more than just a publication that arrives in members' mailboxes.

By treating their magazine as the central hub of their communications, they've built a strategy that extends well beyond print.

## How They Do It

- Website Integration: Key magazine articles are repurposed as online blog posts, creating a searchable archive that drives ongoing traffic and visibility.
- Social Media Highlights: Graphics and snippets from the magazine are shared on LinkedIn and other platforms, sparking conversation and driving readers back to the whole issue.
- Digital Edition: The magazine is also available online, making it easy for members to access and share articles anytime, anywhere.

## Why It Works

By extending the life of their magazine content across digital channels, NWPCA ensures that the time and effort spent creating high-value print content pays off

multiple times over. Instead of being siloed in print, their magazine becomes the fuel for an ongoing, multi-channel member engagement strategy.

## Takeaway for Associations

Your magazine doesn't have to stop at the printed page. When treated as the foundation of your communications plan, it can drive visibility, engagement, and value across every platform where your members are active.









## Chapter 6

# Tailored, Member-Centric Content

Association members are bombarded with content all day, every day. Whether it is a brand trying to sell them something, internal conversations, or the hundreds of social media posts they scroll by, you are fighting for their attention.

Associations can stand out and earn members' attention through tailored, member-centric content. Content that speaks directly to individuals (this could also be personas) instead of content which feels generic and broad to anyone. Speaking to the masses isn't the way to create meaningful engagement.

**Two tools associations can use to create tailored content that resonates with members are:**

- **Segmentation**
- **Surveys**

### Segmentation

Your members care about different topics and have varying priorities; for example, young professionals care about different issues than those approaching the end of their careers. The key is to identify the various stakeholders within our association membership group and segment them.

With segmentation in place, you can tailor the newsletters each group receives, push

out content to various demographics, and create special offers based on each segment.

Segmentation will look different for every association; however, here are some of the most common segments we recommend for our clients:

- **Geographic:** helpful for geo-specific content such as events or regulations
- **Career level:** helpful for content for managers vs non-managers, students vs retired professionals, etc.
- **Stakeholder type:** helpful for distinguishing between core industry practitioners (members working directly in the field) and external stakeholders such as suppliers, vendors, or partners.
- **Certifications or specializations:** helpful for providing targeted updates, resources, or CE opportunities that align with specific credentials or areas of expertise.

### Surveys

Segmentation isn't always possible. However, ensuring the content you're creating resonates with your audience should be. That's where regular surveys come into play.

What does your audience actually care about? One of the best ways to find out is to ask.



## Chapter 7

# Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) – Measuring What Matters


Renewals and new members aren't the only KPIs to track. Going beyond these metrics means associations will have a better idea of understanding which content resonates (and doesn't) before it's too late.

Here are some KPIs we track for all associations we work with:

- Demographics
- Page views
- Link clicks
- Shares
- Sponsored Content (ads)
- QR code analytics

Additional KPIs to track may include:

- Email open and click-through rates
- Event registrations tied to magazine promotion
- Social media engagement on repurposed content
- Ad revenue or sponsorship ROI
- Member satisfaction scores linked to publications

A network diagram with black dots connected by thin grey lines, forming a complex web of connections.

Another area of focus for our Client-Partners is qualitative research from surveys. By adding places to get honest feedback from members, you can understand the following:

- Which topics members want more (or less) of
- How members prefer to consume content (print vs. digital, short vs. long-form)
- Whether your publication is considered a valuable membership benefit
- What's missing – topics, voices, or formats your team may not have considered

A hand holding a tablet displaying various charts and graphs, including a bar chart, a line graph, and a candlestick chart, overlaid on a dark blue background with a light blue circular shape on the right.

**Association surveys often yield modest response rates—typically around 5-10% for standard member outreach, and as low as 2-3% among less engaged stakeholders.**

- mckinley-advisors.com





## Chapter 8

# How to Increase Member Engagement Now

This list has a focus on your magazine being a central piece of your content and membership engagement strategy.

### **Feature Member Spotlight**

Highlight a member in each magazine issue or newsletter, as it fosters community and recognition.

### **Add a “Letter from a Member” Section**

Let members contribute short opinion pieces or stories. It builds ownership and connection.

### **Run a Quick Poll in Your Magazine**

A one-question poll or survey keeps members involved and can guide future content.

### **Include QR Codes for Bonus Content**

Link to a behind-the-scenes video, interview, or downloadable PDF to extend engagement.

### **Share Upcoming Events in a Visual Calendar Format**

Make event info more digestible and increase participation with a visual approach.

### **Introduce a Member Challenge or Contest**

Example: “Share your best tip” or “Submit a photo” to be featured in the next issue.

### **Curate a “Top 5 Resources” Section**

Share helpful tools, industry updates, or association perks in every issue.

### **Use Personalized Member Welcome Inserts**

Add a personalized welcome message or tips for new members in your print or digital magazine.

### **Repurpose Articles into Social Media Snippets**

Share highlights from the magazine on your platforms to create multi-channel engagement.

### **Create a “What’s Next?” Teaser**

End each issue with a sneak peek at next month’s content or a call to action to get involved.

### **Hidden Gem Hunt (Easter Egg in Your Magazine)**

Hide a fun fact, icon, or code in each issue and offer a small prize for members who find it. Encourages deeper reads and return visits.

### **“One Question, Many Voices” Feature**

Ask a single, intriguing question (e.g., “What advice would you give your younger self in this industry?”) and publish 5-10 member answers across a spread. Builds community and gives quiet members a voice.

### **Rotating Guest Editor Program**

Invite a different member or board rep to co-curate one page of the magazine each issue. They pick a quote, image, or resource. Ownership = engagement.

### **Analog Social Sharing: Tear-out Cards or Postcards**

Include a designed tear-out postcard or mini-card in the print edition, encouraging members to mail or hand it to a colleague to invite them to the association – a word-of-mouth approach in analog form.

### **QR Code to “Meet a Mentor”**

Scan to view a rotating profile of a seasoned member who’s open to quick chats or peer support. Makes networking effortless.

### **Gamify the Reading Experience**

Use a digital companion quiz, such as “How well did you read this issue?” with fun, low-stakes trivia about the content – perhaps even a leaderboard.

### **“Before & After” Member Success Mini-Stories**

Feature short transformations (e.g., “Before I joined the association, I was X... now I’ve done Y”). Makes the value real for current and prospective members.

### **Live Magazine Launch Mini-Event**

Host a 15-minute live virtual “first look” of each issue featuring the editor or a surprise guest contributor. Add interactivity with live comments or polls.

### **“Challenge of the Month” Sidebar**

Each issue presents one small challenge (e.g., “Call a lapsed member,” “Attend one new event,” “Share a win on the forum”). Simple, actionable, measurable.



- Smart home
- Into daily life
- Smart furniture
- Virtual reality
- Biofilters and individuality and interiors in 2025 are a mix of styles, combinations, unique art pieces and
- A mix of styles, combinations, unique art pieces and

In 2025, interior design continues to evolve towards a conscious approach, with a balance between functionality, sustainability, and eco-design. Let's explore the main directions that will be popular this year:

- Sustainability remains at the forefront of interior fashion.** Trending elements include:
  - Use of natural materials: wood, stone, clay.
  - Plants as decor elements: from green walls to home gardens.
  - Minimalism with a focus on natural textures and colors: sandy, green, terracotta.
  - Furniture and decor from recycled or upcycled materials.



Design Trends for 2025:  
Individuality, Functionality, and  
Economy, Functionality, and  
Individuality



# TMG's Engagement Ecosystem



A successful association magazine strategy isn't just about publishing content—it's about creating a sustainable system that continuously drives engagement, retention, and growth. That's why Tulip Media Group helps associations implement what we call the Engagement Ecosystem: a proven framework that blends content strategy, design, and distribution into one cohesive model.

## The Engagement Ecosystem Framework

### 1. Strategic Planning First

Every engagement plan begins with your members. We work with associations to map member journeys, identify pain points, and determine what kinds of stories, resources, and formats deliver the most value.

### 2. Magazines as the Hub

Your magazine becomes the anchor point of your ecosystem. It's not just a print piece—it's a resource that feeds every other channel. Stories, features, and announcements flow seamlessly into digital editions, blog posts, social media snippets, and email campaigns.

### 3. Multi-Channel Integration

We don't just stop at publishing. Every article can be repurposed into digital touchpoints, giving members the option to consume content the way they prefer—whether that's flipping through pages, scrolling on their phone, or sharing with a colleague on LinkedIn.

### 4. Member-Centric Storytelling

At the heart of the ecosystem is storytelling. We elevate member voices, highlight community achievements, and show the tangible value of being part of your association. This is what turns a publication into a retention and referral tool.

### 5. Design That Engages

Boring content and poor design kill engagement. Our design approach ensures every page is visually compelling, easy to navigate, and aligned with your association's brand identity.

### 6. Analytics & Optimization

Engagement doesn't end at delivery. We track KPIs across print and digital channels, including readership, QR code scans, ad ROI, and member satisfaction. These insights inform future issues so your magazine gets stronger over time.

What Success Looks Like

## Engagement Ecosystem delivers

- Higher Retention Rates: Members who feel seen, heard, and supported are more likely to renew.
- Increased Referrals: A publication members are proud to share becomes a word-of-mouth driver.
- Expanded Sponsorship Revenue: With more touchpoints advertisers see greater ROI.
- Stronger Member Identity: Your magazine becomes the voice of your community, fostering pride and loyalty.



# About Tulip Media Group

**Tulip Media Group partners with associations across North America to create custom magazines and integrated content strategies that drive measurable engagement. We blend the timeless impact of print with modern digital approaches to help associations retain and grow membership.**

**Ready to refresh your association's  
engagement strategy?**

**Contact us today for a free consultation  
at [TulipMediaGroup.com](https://TulipMediaGroup.com)**

