

7 Tips for Effective Work With Association Management Companies

So, your boss just read an article about the ever-expanding AMC industry and suggests you concentrate your sales and marketing efforts on this growing market. Great. But before you pick up the phone to make your first solicitation, there are several things to keep in mind if you really want to successfully sell to the AMC market.

Explain the Value of AMC Business

One of the benefits of working with AMCs is their potential to use your product or service repeatedly. One association client's great experience with your company can often lead to opportunities to serve other clients on the AMC's roster. Conversely, a bad experience with you or your product could potentially close the door on your ability to do business with any of the AMC's associations. It's essential that you tell your value-chain partners of the repeat business potential that AMC clients represent—you may have only one chance to make an impression that could lead to years of future business from the AMC's other association clients.

Find Out How the AMC Shares Vendor Information

Once the AMC has had one client succeed with you, how can you ensure that the other clients hear about it? Many AMCs hold weekly or monthly roundtable meetings where all of the firm's account executives (or meeting planners or accounting professionals) discuss past successes and future projects. You want your product or service to be praised during those meetings. Ask your AMC contact to share the great experience he or she had with you. Some management companies might even be open to having you attend a staff meeting and make a presentation.

Do Your Homework

Most AMCs have websites and many are active in social media (Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, and blogs). Do your homework and find out what associations the AMC manages (note that some AMC client rosters change frequently, and not all AMCs list all clients on their websites). Are the association's clients mainly state-based, national or international? Does the AMC concentrate on associations within one industry (medical, technology, education)? If so, can you offer examples of other associations within those industries that have had a good experience with your product or service?

Don't Consider the AMC the Third Party

Resist the tendency to refer to the AMC's association client as the end-user client or the AMC as the third party when discussing your product or service. AMC staff members many times identify strongly with their clients. Sometimes an AMC assigns its association client a full-time AMC staff person (or several staff people) to serve the account. AMC contacts may often refer to their client association as we or us, just as an association management professional at a stand-alone association would. Referencing the AMC as the association client's third party might be offensive.

Check Your Client List for AMCs

You may already be working with an AMC and not know it. Because of the identity crisis explained above, it can be hard to discern which associations are stand-alone and which are AMC managed. Many AMCs pride themselves on their ability to appear to their client associations' members to be a stand-alone headquarters for their association. They may have a separate phone line for each association client (answered in the name of the association). AMC staff (most serving at least two associations) may have separate email addresses for each client served, as well as an email address at the AMC. They carry multiple business cards, using the appropriate client's card, depending on the circumstance. Do not assume the associations you are working with are stand-alone associations. A simple question, such as "Is this association managed by an AMC?" or "Are there additional associations managed from your offices?" could reveal that you already have an AMC on your client list.

Ask For the Referral

If you have had a great experience with an AMC-managed association, ask your contact (the AMC account executive or other staff member) to share that positive story with their colleagues. Solicit their opinion regarding other clients that might have a similar need for your product or service. Ask your contact to be your champion within the AMC, and remember to show your appreciation for their support of you and your company.

Offer the Referral

Finally, the greatest thing you can do for one of your AMC clients is help them find and win new business. As you work with your stand-alone clients, be on the lookout for those associations that might benefit from the services offered by an association management company. Perhaps it's the executive director who mentions to you that they are looking to outsource a project (many full-service AMCs take on project-based work as well). Maybe it's the volunteer-run organization that you think might be getting too large and could be more effectively managed by an AMC. Whatever the case, your AMC clients will be grateful for any lead.

Reference:

Gold, J. (2011, February). 7 tips for effective work with association management companies. Consultants Connection. ASAE.