

# AMCs: Partners in every economy

## Monitor the environment to get through economic downturns

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Being a sailor, spring for me means weekends at the boatyard, toiling on our 25-year-old "family cruiser." Come summer, Lake Michigan can be counted on to serve up opportunities to navigate through wildly volatile weather conditions. As an assn professional, I see clear parallels with leading an assn through uncertain times such as these we now face.



There are a number of ways to navigate these conditions. You can "hunker down," yet the environment will always win. You can "steer wave to wave," employing no strategy or vision, and hope your organization can stand the test. Or, you can "execute storm tactics" based on what the environment is telling you: clear decks, adjust sails, gather all data, and steer a course dictated by proactive planning and execution.

The only wise choice, both on the water and for assns facing unprecedented challenges, is

the last of these. Here are five key steps to execute these tactics:

■ **Monitor internal core management fundamentals.** Before surveying the external landscape, organizations need to look within. Listen to the "environment" of the staff and exhibit unprecedented "people care," such as communication, reinforcement of your organization's chosen values, and open-door policies. Efficiently execute time-tested core management fundamentals, such as accurate and timely financial reporting, prompt and helpful customer service, and prudent renegotiation of contracts.

■ **Perform a critical review** of your organization's portfolio of programs, products and services. Establish a process, acquire objective information, shelve emotional thinking and critically review key performance indicators to gauge what's working and what's not. Blend this internal review with consideration of your competitors. Where do they dominate (where you just dabble)? What constituent segments are growing or declining? Agree to implement the changes that are needed, which is sometimes the hardest part.

■ **Take the pulse of your "loyal base."** Repeatedly reach out to your core constituents so that your organization remains a "top of mind" resource. These can be members, exhibitors, sponsors or others, and your methods of measuring "loyal" can vary. What is important is their understanding that you recognize them as special. More than ever, your personal outreach must keep them engaged and offer opportunities for collaborative problem solving.

■ **Monitor your communities through social media.** Increasingly easy-to-use Web-based tools offer a cost-effective means to facilitate real-time communications among your constituents. Whether they are hosted by your assn or elsewhere, these forums also offer a goldmine of insight. Use volunteers or headquarters staff to help monitor and place frequent, concise messages. Doing so will help uncover new trends and opportunities, and also keep your assn in the mix of peer discussion.

■ **Be proactive and aggressive in developing new partnerships.** Never before has the opportunity of partnerships been so critical to helping assns prevail. These uncertain times call for considering and forwarding bold proposals for working with other organizations. Older, slow-burn approaches must be discarded and replaced with decisive overtures that can deliver close-to-immediate returns and advantages that can be put into play efficiently.

While some assns might be tempted to simply hunker down or maneuver without a clear-cut course, monitoring internal and external environments can provide extremely valuable navigation aids in uncertain times. These steps will help organizations prevail and emerge stronger and revitalized for the future.

The SmithBucklin Innovation Center helps assns develop and launch revenue-generating services and products. Contact Schmahl at dschmahl@smithbucklin.com.

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