



## **The Benefits of Professional Association Membership**

*Provided by the career experts at Robert Half*

Given the number of responsibilities that you juggle on a daily basis, joining a professional organization may not be one of your top priorities. After all, what businessperson has time for more meetings and activities?

But such thinking can cause you to miss out on the numerous benefits that membership in a professional association offers. Whether you join an industry-specific group, a special-focus organization (for women entrepreneurs or small-business owners, for example), a neighborhood-based merchants' association or the local chapter of a national trade organization, you'll make valuable professional contacts and gain access a wealth of useful information.

### **Basic Benefits**

Although each organization has its own unique advantages, most professional associations offer some or all of the following basic benefits:

*Exclusive online resources.* The websites of most professional associations have "members-only" sections that provide access to a variety of databases and message boards, as well as list-serv subscriptions so that you can be notified via e-mail about upcoming events and special activities that may not be open to the general public. Some feature content on a variety of topics, such as running a business, advancing your career or boosting your technology expertise.

*Networking opportunities.* When you join a professional organization, you'll deepen existing business relationships and make new contacts on a regular basis. Such networking goes beyond the exchange of business cards – as you attend periodic meetings, become active on a committee or take a prominent leadership role, you'll forge lasting ties with others who have common professional interests and similar business concerns. These relationships will be a rich, ongoing source of inspiration and ideas.

*Education.* Many professional associations offer their members the chance to update their knowledge of business and trade basics or acquire new skills through seminars, workshops, break-out sessions at conferences and online courses. Typical subject matter can run the gamut from tax tips and small business financing to advice about hiring and staff management.

*Free or discounted publications.* Membership in many groups includes a free subscription to the organization's magazine. Some associations also offer their members free publications and discounts on CDs, journals, videos/DVDs and other materials.

*Conferences and seminars.* Members are often given priority registration for their organization's convention and may receive discounts on conference fees or special rates on related expenses, such as hotel reservations and car rentals.

### **Beyond the Basics**

Depending on the organization, there may be additional benefits beyond those listed above. Some organizations, for example, offer access to capital for members looking to grow their businesses. Other less tangible but equally important benefits can include:

*Support system.* Members of professional associations can often take advantage of formal coaching or mentoring relationships with more experienced businesspeople who provide guidance and useful insights. Even on an informal basis, such relationships can be a source of answers and solutions when you're facing a challenging situation in your business. At the very least, the feeling that you have a support network behind you can boost your confidence when problems arise.

*Political clout.* Large national organizations often have committees to track federal and state legislative developments that could have an impact on their specific business or industry. Such organizations have a significant political presence that far exceeds that of individual members. Joining this type of professional organization enables you to tap into the group's political influence and resources.

*Civic leadership.* As an individual businessperson, you may not have the time or resources to sponsor a charitable event, partner with an educational institution or otherwise participate in community activities. But if your professional organization is active in civic and

philanthropic ventures, you can become involved in many worthwhile projects. Associations contribute to their communities in a variety of ways, from providing scholarships and hosting career days for students to supporting important charitable causes.

Joining a professional organization is beneficial for your own professional development and the future of your business. The connections you'll make, the resources made available to you and the ideas and advice you'll discover represent an outstanding return on what amounts to a modest, manageable investment of time, money and effort. It could turn out to be one of the best things you could do for yourself and your business.

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