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Title: Private Social Networks: What's the Magic Formula for Associations?

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Many associations think there is a secret formula to making their private social networks successful, but there actually isn't one. There are, however, a number of best practices that associations can follow to help improve experiences for members as their online communities grow and serve as an information hub about their organizations.

Associations shouldn't feel pressured to maintain communication on their sites, rather, they should act as hosts - once the sites are created, it's up to constituents to cultivate relationships, start discussions and share knowledge. The role of organizations is to ensure that members get as much value from the sites as possible. The following tips can provide compelling social networks for your audiences.

One of the greatest benefits of private social communities is that they provide opportunities to network and learn from one another. According to [GoLightly](#), an online community provider, associations should seed their newly launched sites with groups, blog posts and discussion questions and any other ice-breakers. Once there is active participation, organizations can step back and let members build relationships and create their own content. If activity slows down, start a discussion to get things moving again. To encourage participation and growth, associations should showcase their private social networks at every opportunity, through promotions at events, in newsletters and on their public social media profiles, including Twitter and Facebook.

Private social networks are also a great way for associations to learn more about their constituents. Their information is plugged directly into organizations' databases, which associations can use to tailor future communications and other programs. Also, ask constituents for input to improve your networks. By taking what is learned and putting it into practice, organizations will prove that they are listening. In addition, to keep the community motivated, create a reward recognition program, such as interviewing a frequent user every month on your sites or in newsletters.

It's important for associations to remember that private social networks should serve as a knowledge base for members. It's helpful for organizations to post announcements and news to their sites and have them serve as a main source of information. Also, provide forums to encourage communication and knowledge sharing. Private social networks offer associations a chance to help new members get acquainted with organizations as well. Launching special sections of the sites can be a great way to do this; for example, a how-to guide that shares tips and tricks for getting the most value

out of their memberships. New members also can be matched up with veteran members to get an inside look into how things work and the opportunities that come along with being part of their associations.

When it comes to private social networks, there is no magic formula. Associations need to remember that their relationships with constituents are unique - any guidelines for successfully using them should just serve as templates. While it's up to organizations to act as facilitators and help constituents have the best possible experience, in the end, it's the members that need to use private social networks, build relationships with peers and gather valuable knowledge about their organizations. Details: www.advsol.com.