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Driving Non-Dues Revenue with Your Member Benefits Program

Since 2009, The Florida Bar has trusted Affinipay/LawPay as their payment processing partner and offered our solution as a vetted and approved member benefit. The Florida Bar member benefit program is one of the most active bar associations in the country, and much of that success is due to Terry Hill, the Division Director of Programs at The Florida Bar.

Over the course of his 15 year career with The Florida Bar, Terry has helped grow the organization's list of member benefit providers from approximately 30 vendors to over 60. In addition to his role at The Florida Bar, Terry is also President of the National Association of Bar Executives (NABE).

In short, Terry Hill has a particularly thorough awareness and understanding of the concerns and motivations of associations and professional societies. We asked him to share some of his expertise and insider knowledge on two things that are likely at the top of every association director's list of priorities: non-dues revenue and member benefits.

Getting Started with a Non-Dues Revenue Program

If you're building a non-dues revenue program from the ground up (or are executing an overhaul of your current program), your first step should be to ask members for direct feedback.



One option is to take a page from The Florida Bar playbook. Every year The Florida Bar conducts one of two surveys:

- Membership Opinion Survey (sent in odd-numbered years)
- Economics and Law Office Management Survey (sent in even-numbered years)

Through these surveys, the bar gets valuable insight into not only their members' opinions about current benefits but also which benefits members would like to see added.

Depending on the structure of your organization, you can also use a focus group. The advantage of a focus group is that a live dialogue amongst multiple group members might reveal more insights than just a one-to-one survey. Here are some examples of open-ended questions you can ask:

1. What are your toughest challenges as a professional?
2. What are your biggest professional priorities?
3. What issues have the greatest impact on our industry as a whole?

Ultimately, your goal should be to establish a system that enables you to maintain a continuous pulse on your membership so you can easily collect data and then act on it.

Choosing What to Offer as a Member Benefit

Above everything else, a member perk must satisfy two criteria:

1. It provides a unique benefit.
2. It isn't accessible to just anyone.

From there, you need to identify benefits that are substantial and offer continuing value, and that show your dedication to the well-being and success of your members.

Finding benefits that check these boxes requires taking a holistic and thoughtful approach. You need to evaluate what your members need in all aspects of their lives—both personal and professional.

Think beyond products and services that are exclusively career-related. In other words, what kind of benefits can you offer that encourage members to be well-rounded by supporting a healthy work-life balance?

For example, in addition to discounts on things like practice management technology and research tools, members of the Florida Bar receive discounted prices on gym memberships, home meal delivery services, and mental health counseling.

Member benefits should act as a clear representation of your appreciation for your members' enrollment in your association.

Helping Providers Promote Their Product/Service

One of the most successful strategies The Florida Bar uses to improve adoption of a member benefit is also one of the most

controversial. Upon completion of the vetting and approval process, member benefit providers receive almost unfettered access to Florida Bar members.

Taking this approach requires you to collaborate with each individual vendor to build a unique co-marketing plan that aims to achieve two fundamental objectives:

1. Ensure the provider's product or service is promoted via the most appropriate channels using relevant messaging that resonates with your members
2. Demonstrate to members that your association and the provider are working as true partners to provide the most value to them

Now, this isn't to say that you should allow vendors to market to your members however they want with no oversight. You need to be sure the provider understands your rules for how they can (and can't) communicate with members in order to protect the integrity of your relationship with your members.

"One of the things that we do that we've had great success with is we really provide our member benefit providers almost unfettered access to our membership."



Terry Hill
Division Director of
Programs at The Florida Bar

Measuring the Success of a Member Benefit

The amount of non-dues revenue generated by a specific benefit is certainly a good measurement of its success. After all, driving more non-dues revenue is one of the two main goals of establishing a member benefits

program (the other, of course, being to support an exceptional member experience.)

However, it isn't the only indicator of progress. You also need to know how much your members are actually taking advantage of the benefit.

This is why, as part of your process for evaluating a potential partner, you need to confirm the provider has the ability to regularly report (either monthly or quarterly) on how many of your members are using their product or service.

These reports don't have to be overly detailed; they just need to give you visibility into whether usage of their product or service by your members is increasing, declining, or staying stagnant. In addition, if the reports show utilization is low, the provider should be willing to work together with your association to identify opportunities to improve it.

Remember: your members won't participate in your benefits program just because it's there. You need to work with providers to promote it and show its value.

Avoiding a Common Pitfall

You may have noticed a common recurring theme throughout each of the previous sections: the importance of honest, consistent communication—between the association and your members, the association and your partners, and between partners and your members.

This is because the bedrock of an effective non-dues revenue program is awareness and education. And the absence of these two

elements is one of the most common reasons an individual benefit (or even an entire program) ends up being a bust.

When it comes to member benefits, there is no autopilot; there is no "set it and forget it." Both your association and your partners have a responsibility to maintain the connection between the two organizations.

Further, if they hope to drive purchases of their product or service, providers also have a duty to coordinate with your association to create marketing campaigns that allow them to actively engage with your members on an ongoing basis.

"Everyone is a vendor on day one. But through collaboration and teamwork on marketing and branding along with involvement in other aspects of the association, member benefit providers become true member benefit partners."

The Takeaway

The key to an extraordinary member benefits program that generates a reliable flow of non-dues revenue is simple: commitment. A commitment to serving your members in all parts of their lives. A commitment to being deliberate and discerning about who you choose as a member benefit provider. A commitment to fostering open and honest communication. Simply put, when you make a commitment to only work with providers who are interested in building genuine partnerships, you can be confident you're working with people who are just as invested in the success and well-being of your members as you are.