



## Associations with Global Membership

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### How to remain efficient whilst catering to global membership needs. The dilemma for association leaders today

Over the past centuries, only a few empires could claim that the sun never set on them. In today's globalised world, many different entities are active worldwide, including associations with international membership. However, the specificity of associations is that they are often more constrained by limited financial and human resources than other entities, such as international organizations or multinational companies.

To list but a few of their tasks, association staff usually have to serve members globally in different time zones from one single office, organize major meetings on various continents, sometimes deal with very technical issues and be able to overcome cultural differences and languages barriers. All this seems to be virtually impossible with a staff of between 5 and 20 people, but it is precisely the framework in which most global associations evolve every day.

Of course the availability of modern communication technologies makes it possible for associations to be in regular contact with their members. But an association – of any kind – is not simply about receiving emails or participating in teleconferences. For an association to live, nothing has until now replaced the good old face-to-face contact between members and with the association's staff.

To stay close to their global membership, many associations create local chapters of members and subsidiary offices to serve them. But such a solution can prove costly, increases administrative costs, and create negative competition between offices.

To overcome these potential difficulties, some global associations successfully use association management companies with offices worldwide to handle their local chapters. This solution allows for a clear control of costs engaged, is fully flexible in terms of staffing, allows for a clear assessment of activities undertaken and clear reporting lines and allows members to benefit from the services of dedicated professionals in a wide range of specializations. It also allows the opening and closing of offices relatively easily, as required by the changing needs of the association.

Growing membership needs and the drive to always provide added value to each and every member whilst remaining resource efficient, all in a global environment, is the current challenge of the 21st century – but there are indeed solutions to the dilemma !

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