

How to Launch a Successful Knowledge-Sharing Network



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A knowledge-sharing network can bring in nondues revenue and serve your membership. Here are a few tips for associations thinking about launching a platform dedicated to sharing members' expertise.

Associations are always looking for ways to bring in more revenue and to better serve their members. And it's a bonus if they can find ways that accomplish both things at once.

There are many examples of this win-win strategy. For instance an association that takes a new approach to meetings by connecting members to relevant sponsors. Or an association that hosts a webinar sponsored by a company that has a great deal for its members. A knowledge-sharing network is yet another way that associations might serve members and generate nondues revenue.

The Higher Education Consultants Association recently launched its own knowledge-sharing network—the College Admissions Expert Calling Network (ECN). HECA's Executive Director Ping Wei shares the association's experience, which was a coordinated effort involving Brainsy, a knowledge-sharing platform. Brian Christie, Brainsy's CEO and Chief Innovation Officer, also offers tips for associations thinking about launching their own network.

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What is a knowledge-sharing network? A knowledge-sharing network is a platform that enables an association's members to share their expertise one-on-one with the public for a fee, via phone or online exchange.

In HECA's case, the platform connects its members—higher-education consultants—with students and parents that have questions about the college admissions process. "What's nice about the expert calling network is that it can be used as a lead generator," said Wei in a previous article posted on AssociationsNow.com. "It allows our members to have a broader reach of untapped audiences [by] casting a wider net through the internet. It also allows our members to monetize their services."

What is the ROI for associations and their members? The College Admissions ECN gives HECA and its members a new revenue channel. "Each expert sets their own advertised rate for a call transaction, and immediately at the conclusion of a call, Brainsy charges the consumer and sends a commission directly to the expert," Christie says. HECA also racks up a commission on each call, as well as any revenue from advertisements or sponsorships of the platform, which Brainsy delivers in quarterly royalty checks.

Does the association have to spend time promoting the knowledge-sharing network? Promotion is important, but it's relatively pain-free for associations. Brainsy recommends that associations promote the platform on their site and also recommends that the individual experts promote their profiles through social media and personal networks. Christie says this approach can drive viral attention to the individual consultant and the platform.

In the long term, Christie says that these knowledge-sharing networks will "win search." In the HECA example, students and parents might type a college admissions question into search, which might lead them to a consultant, a discussion board, and the College Admissions ECN. "We've architected this platform in such a way to really tap into search," Christie says. "In our views, this is like an SEO rocket ship."

How can an association know that it's a good fit for a knowledge-sharing network? Christie says that any association should consider a knowledge-sharing network. "The infrastructure is general purpose, but the feature set is highly configurable, so any association that wants to tap into member-generated content to promote member mentoring and/or member-to-nonmember lead generation or commercial transactions could find a knowledge-sharing network a great fit," he says. "This all boils down to increased member value, increased relevancy, increased visibility of the association, and nondues revenue."

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