

# The Content Roadmap to Recovery

Eight Ways  
to Recharge Your Revenue

# Foreword

Membership value is realized through four pillars: cause, community, communications, and content. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, many associations substantially changed their content pillar, adopting virtual formats, eliminating membership access requirements, and reducing fees. Notably, virtual education and virtual conferences were commonly available to registrants for no charge.

Intentional changes to the membership content pillar brought unintentional changes to the value of association membership. To support associations facing content-related revenue setbacks, we offer this *Roadmap to Recovery* with guidance for a route through this time of great change. We appreciate the research assistance from McKinley Advisors which fielded the survey that helped inform our recommendations.

If you would like to talk more about the findings of the study, arrange for a presentation of the data, or learn how your association can leverage content for the good of your mission and long-term success, please reach out.

Chris Gloede

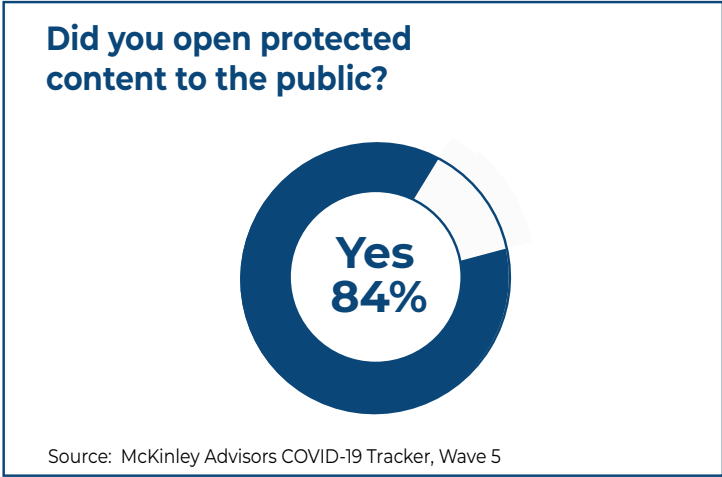
Tracy Talbot

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chris Gloede". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tracy Talbot". The signature is written in a cursive style.

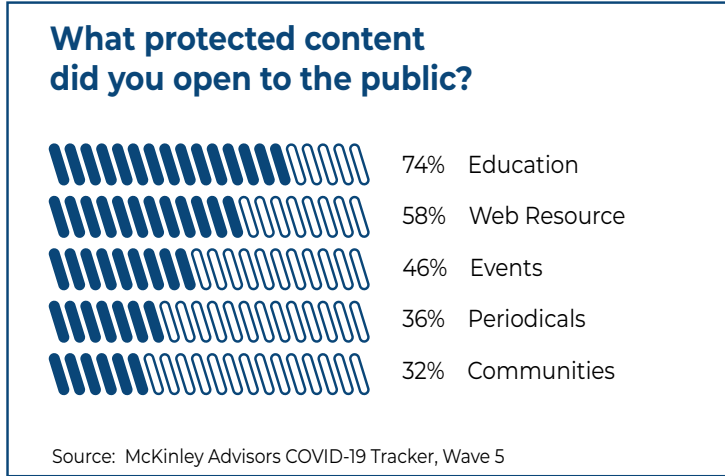
# How COVID-19 Reshaped Content

Traditionally, associations measured the success of their proprietary content through the lens of membership dues, subscription revenue, registration fees and mission alignment. They generated income through well-established practices that controlled content across publications, meetings, education, and communities. Many associations used this approach to safeguard membership value by preserving the most valuable content behind the member paywall.

However, in spring 2020, the immediacy and severity of the COVID-19 crisis disrupted content practices and prompted many organizations to abandon their standing policies for content management. Driven by their missions, associations redirected resources to serve their industries with critical and timely information. McKinley Advisors' recent COVID-19 survey found that 84% of associations had released content that typically would be reserved for members.



Whether developing new content or rapidly reconfiguring conferences, associations responded with broad access. Associations removed membership requirements to share COVID-19 information within their professions and the public.



# Content Roadmap to Recovery

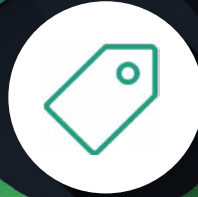
## Paywall

Update member paywall strategy after reviewing recent COVID-related paywall exceptions.



## Pricing

Review content pricing, recognizing that virtual events are no longer inferior to in-person events.



## Agility

Encourage the entrepreneurial culture developed during the early days of the pandemic.



## Messages

Monitor and update repetitive messages, especially automated and transactional emails.



## Infrastructure

Revisit virtualization technologies and processes, many of which were rushed, temporary decisions made under pressing deadlines.



## Potential

Associations should identify the highest-value content through analytics tracking the most popular products and services.



## Mission

Use mission as a guidepost when adapting content to expanded audiences.



## Proposition

Understand content needs of new audiences through analytics and fresh research.



# Content Valuation

Responding to the immediacy and impact of the virus, many associations opened even their most valuable member content to the public, including educational webinars and conferences.

The free content resources were largely related to the pandemic's effect on an industry's operations, health and safety practices, government regulation, or government financial support programs.



## Update Paywall Practices

Associations should update their member paywall strategy after reviewing recent COVID-related paywall exceptions.

Understand how and why the paywall strategy was abandoned in the pandemic, especially for education and events. Return to content objectives and rebalance the mission and business goals with special consideration for new audiences and their new needs. Create new paywall strategy scenarios with revenue projections.



## Update Content Pricing

Associations should review content pricing, recognizing that virtual events are no longer considered inferior to in-person events.

Research and understand the pandemic's economic impact on your audience segments. Consider the use of targeted discounts for affected audiences rather than across-the-board price cuts. Create financial models using different pricing scenarios before making final decisions.

“We increased webinars from one per week to five. We also opened COVID-related recordings to nonmembers on a limited basis.”

Jacklyn Kozakiewicz Attia, CAE  
Assistant Director, Membership Strategy & Operations  
American Chemistry Society



“We are evaluating our product and service mix to determine how updated public pricing can create more membership value.”

Association Executive  
McKinley Advisors COVID-19 Tracker, Wave 5



# Content Immediacy

With understanding of the COVID-19 virus constantly evolving and government response quickly changing, content from associations could no longer follow a plodding production and publication schedule. Associations listened to audience needs as concerns shifted by collecting, evaluating, and disseminating relevant content in rapid succession.

To be nimble, many associations engaged in shorter, focused sprints that allowed them to prioritize initiatives in real time and set and meet goals with a greater focus on member and audience needs. They responded with changes to their editorial review processes in a manner that prioritized expediency.



## Encourage Agility

Associations should encourage the entrepreneurial culture developed during the early days of the pandemic.

Create new programs, newsletters, webinars, and other content expanding beyond the COVID-19 focus. Integrate temporary teams from assorted departments to contribute fresh perspective and add skills. Set expectations for fast time-to-market.



## Update Routine Messages

Associations should monitor and update repetitive messages, especially automated and transactional emails.

Assess the messages in the shifting landscape and ensure they reflect and remain relevant. Continue to periodically check messages and update them to meet audience expectations and mindset.

“Our members were on the front line and needed the latest information. They wanted to hear from the association every day.”

Paul Pomerantz, FACHE  
Chief Executive Officer  
American Society of Anesthesiologists



“Nonmembers are allowed to participate in virtual roundtables and discussion forums. We’ve also added virtual events with nonmember access and low fees.”

Association Executive  
McKinley Advisors COVID-19 Tracker, Wave 5



# Content Format

With restrictions on corporate travel and public gatherings grounding travel across the country, associations changed the in-person events that many of their members had come to value.

While some events were canceled, many more were moved to virtual-only formats, often simultaneously reducing or eliminating the registration fee or membership requirement. While the technology to conduct these activities online has existed for years, regulations and traditions previously hindered association adoption.



## Revisit Content Infrastructure

Associations should revisit virtualization technologies and processes, many of which were rushed, temporary decisions made under pressing deadlines.

Anticipate virtual demands from members and customers even after travel and gathering restrictions are relaxed. Revise content to be virtual-first experiences using tools that are well integrated with your AMS, financial, and marketing systems.



## Establish Content Potential

Associations should identify the highest-value content through analytics tracking the most popular products and services.

Upgrade data collection and reporting infrastructure and processes. Track issues, topics, and programs that result in joins, downloads, views, shares, purchases, and registrations.

“Most important is serving our mission and getting helpful information out to the workers in our profession.”

Pierre Désy, MPH, CAE  
Chief Executive Officer  
Society of Gynecologic Oncology and  
The Foundation for Women’s Cancer



“We are developing plans and budgets for online programming that is available to nonmembers, for a fee.”

Association Executive  
McKinley Advisors COVID-19 Tracker, Wave 5



# Content Reach

With conferences available in virtual formats, associations quickly discovered increased international registrations. Associations adapted their programming schedules to accommodate foreign time zones, especially for smaller events.

The worldwide impact of the health crisis also drove many associations to consider the global needs of professionals in their industries and, in some cases, develop new content specifically for international audiences. Organizations added closed captioning and transcripts to existing video content. Some organizations added content translation or native language content.



## Focus On Mission

Associations should use their mission as a guidepost when adapting content to expanded audiences.

Evaluate the cost of expanded reach against the real impact to the new audiences. Ensure that new audiences offer meaningful potential and substantial numbers. Anticipate that new audiences will soon require their own unique content rather than existing content that is simply translated, edited or repurposed.



## Establish Value Proposition

Associations should understand content needs of new audiences through analytics and fresh research.

Personalize communications to feature relevant content and reflect localized cultures. Engage diverse team members reflecting those cultures when developing content for new audiences.

“We’ve added evening webinars to serve the Asian audience and are scheduling additional broadcasts at times that better meet international attendee needs.”

Eileen Kiley  
Director of Communications  
Materials Research Society



“Resources created during the pandemic are expected to drive engagement, brand loyalty, membership, fundraising, and grants up in the long term.”

Association Executive  
McKinley Advisors COVID-19 Tracker, Wave 5





# Thank You

While the road ahead remains unpredictable, associations have the power to transform through innovation and substantial transformations. With rich content, associations have the opportunity to meet member needs and fortify their business models with enduring value.

Thank you to the McKinley Advisors staff that assisted with this report, especially Patrick Glaser, Vice President of Research, Caity Reynolds, Marketing Specialist, and Jessica Johnson, Content Specialist.

Thank you to the association leaders and executives that provided their valuable observations and insights for this report. You and the thousands of association members, staff and volunteers are what make the nonprofit sector a powerful resource for society.

We would especially like to extend our thanks to the following executives for the time they shared helping us understand recent changes to the content landscape:

Pierre Désy, MPH, CAE  
Chief Executive Officer  
Society of Gynecologic Oncology and The Foundation for Women's Cancer

Eileen Kiley  
Director of Communications  
Materials Research Society

Jacklyn Kozakiewicz Attia, CAE  
Assistant Director  
Membership Strategy and Operations, American Chemistry Society

Paul Pomerantz, FACHE  
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Chris is the Chief Consultant for Ricochet Advisory Services, a consultancy serving professional associations. Chris helps associations leverage modern marketing technologies and strategies to build stronger connections to prospects, clients, and members. Previously, Chris was the first Chief Marketing Officer of the American Bar Association where he created a culture of innovation, helped the organization recover from the recession, and reversed decades of membership decline.



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Tracy served as McKinley Advisors' Senior Vice President for Marketing, where she helped associations expand marketing capacity and optimize resources. From organizational marketing strategies to program, product or conference campaigns, Tracy and her team provided clients with the needed resources and guidance to modernize associations' marketing efforts. Tracy provided full-service marketing solutions as well as revenue-generating and audience building campaigns specific to virtual events, in-person conferences, credentials, and membership conversion.

# About Ricochet

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Ricochet understands that associations are constantly transforming through a perpetual cycle of renewal. We help transformations through a partnered approach that inspires your staff and prepares them to meet business challenges. Ricochet develops new marketing and membership strategies empowered by new technology, new processes, new analytics, and a new culture of trial and experimentation.

## About This Study

This study is informed by association executive-level interviews conducted by Ricochet Advisory Services, LLC and McKinley Advisors, Inc. in April 2020 and June 2020, as well as an anonymous online survey of 60 association executives conducted in June 2020 by McKinley Advisors, Inc. Quotes have been edited for length and clarity. Survey terms and questions have been edited for length and clarity.

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