

# What Do Members Really Want?

## Installment I

This article is part of a series under this column to explore the core issues currently facing SPE. As you all know, SPE has experienced dramatic declines in membership in recent years, and the burning question on the mind of every Section and Division board member is how to reverse the trend.

SPE has had to take a hard look at, and make an honest appraisal of, its core value proposition – the thing that really makes the Society of ongoing use to its members and the plastics industry. Central to that discussion is the market research SPE has conducted in the past and continues to gather today from members and potential members alike.

In my experience, most Section and Division boards are not aware of the amount of information available at SPE headquarters to help them assess and plan programs for their members or craft membership recruitment campaigns.

As a result, the first installment of this article is an outline of all the member research and information techniques we utilize at SPE headquarters. Next month, Installment II will review the key conclusions and assumptions SPE made based on these various data sources to develop ongoing action plans and implement a new member-focused strategy.

### INFORMATION SOURCES

The following indicates the past and ongoing market research that is available at SPE.

#### Data Mining

SPE's database contains demographic information on its membership on geographic location, functional titles, actual titles, areas of interest, industry affiliation (new), age, gender, purchasing history, etc. SPE conducts ongoing analysis of this data to seek answers to specific questions about membership needs. Section and Division boards already have online access to portions of this information to help them in their analysis and planning. Queries to the database for specific or more detailed information for Section or Division use should be directed to SPE headquarters.

#### Formal Studies

SPE commissioned two comprehensive studies in the late 1990's. These studies resulted in a wealth of information about how members and non-members viewed SPE and what they expected from the Society. This data has been resurrected, and specific conclusions re-tested in many cases, to see how things have changed (or remained the same).

#### Exit Surveys

For a number of years, SPE has used telemarketing to members whose dues have lapsed. When folks don't renew their membership, the telemarketing firms ask a few standard questions to get an understanding of why they haven't renewed. This data is reviewed regularly to see when and why folks are leaving SPE.

### Individual Surveys

Many groups within SPE, as well as SPE headquarters itself, have conducted surveys. Society staff and leaders have reviewed many of these surveys to see how the results support, or do not support, working assumptions about membership. SPE has also conducted surveys of its leadership, which, while not providing a representative sample of the “typical” member, do help to support or refute working assumptions.

### Corporate Surveys

The SPE Foundation recently conducted a feasibility study to determine if funding was available for an SPE Capital Campaign. The study included professionally conducted face-to-face interviews with senior corporate individuals who were asked a number of general questions about their impressions of SPE.

### Online Polls & E-Surveys

Last, but not least, SPE Headquarters conducts regular member polling via its monthly E-Bulletin, as well as occasional sample surveying of members on specific questions. Because this data is electronically collected, it has some inherent biases (e.g., anyone who is e-mail or online survey adverse will not have their views included). Again, this mechanism is used more to confirm, or get some partial feeling on, an issue, and is less reliable if it is the only source.

### ANECDOTAL EVIDENCE

While not scientific, SPE staff keeps abreast of customer complaints and compliments, feedback from members on events, and assorted other data that “comes in over the transom” informally. We also take some of the assumptions formed from the data sources above, and ask people informally about them in conversations, at committee meetings, at Council meetings, etc.

I’ve devoted Installment I of this article to creating an outline of the information sources SPE uses to remind you of two things. First, all Section and Division boards have a lot of data available to them. Please make use of it. And, second, as you collect data via surveys or other mechanisms when working with your individual groups, please pass it along to SPE headquarters so we can add it to our analysis and thinking and, thereby, share it with the entire SPE community.

### PART TWO

Next month, I will include some specific analysis derived from all of the sources above, and outline the key assumptions, strategies and action plans currently in place to bring members into SPE.

Respectfully submitted,

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