



Association Global Growth Trends Survey

2013-18

By: Terrance Barkan CAE | GLOBALSTRAT IIc

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Executive Summary

For almost 30 years, GLOBALSTRAT has been collecting independent data on how international associations are approaching global membership, programs and engagement. This valuable information and insights are used to help associations to make better informed decisions when developing their international strategies and business plans.

According to the United Nations (UN), the world population is expected to reach 8.5 billion by 2030 and 9.7 billion in 2050. As global standards of living continue to increase, far fewer people are living in absolute poverty and large “emerging market” populations with disposable income are growing significantly.

Globalization is the worldwide movement toward greater economic, financial, trade, cultural, scientific and communications integration.

For associations, this scenario is extremely positive with major new markets that will need the types of benefits and services that associations are uniquely positioned to provide; professional development, knowledge transfer, networking, education, standards, certifications, professional designations, and more.

With more than 200 countries and territories worldwide, the challenges for associations are daunting; a.) how to identify which markets hold the greatest opportunities, b.) determining which business models are best suited to address these specific markets, c.) how to develop a proactive growth strategy that takes advantage of these opportunities.

GLOBALSTRAT has collected input from from nearly 700 participating trade and professional associations from more than 20 countries over the period 2013, 2016 and 2018. This summarized report compares the results over that period of time, helping to identify the trends and important factors that make the difference between successful international associations, and those that struggle to grow.

We wish to thank the hundreds of association executives whose input makes this report possible.

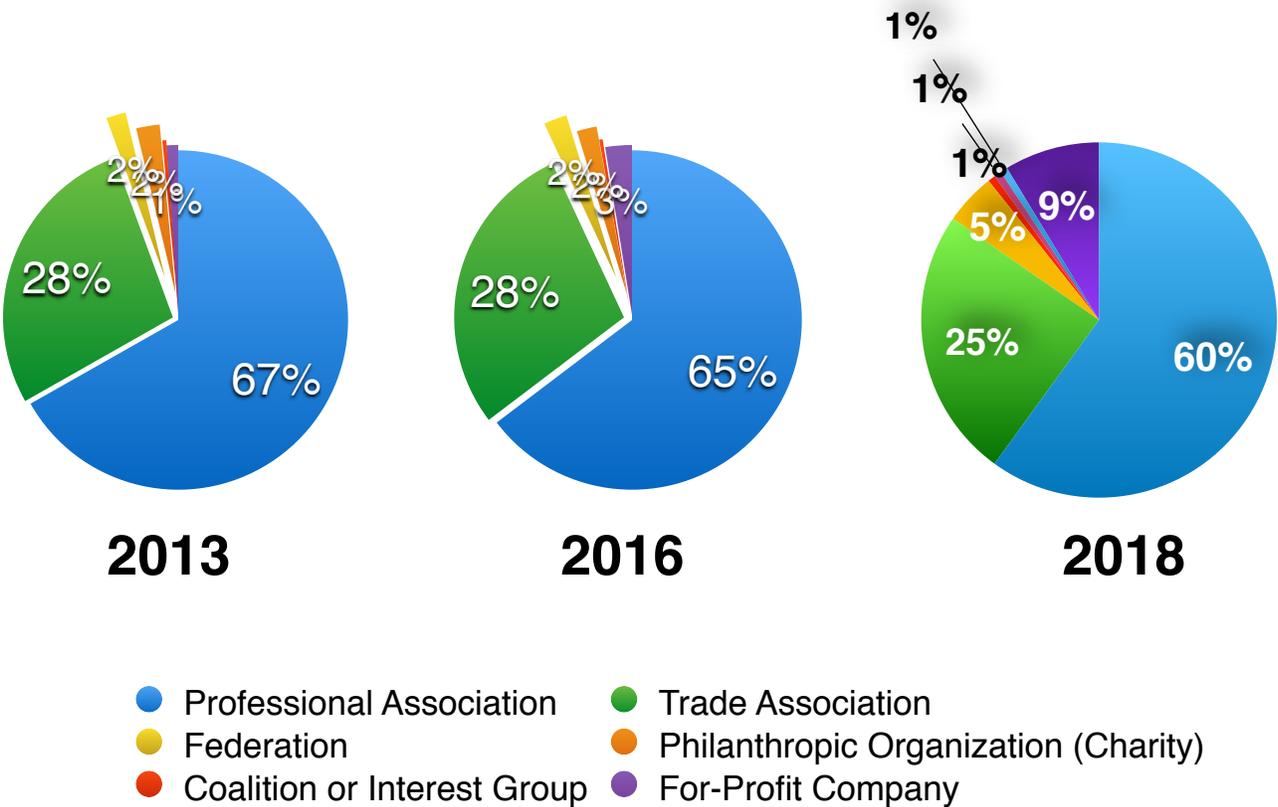
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Profile Of Survey Participants

The vast majority of survey respondents represented professional or trade associations, with a much smaller number of federations and other forms of non-profit organizations. In addition, some for-profit companies, such as association management companies, also participated.

1 in 4 of the responses came directly from the CEO or Executive Director of their organization.

Note: Professional Associations are organizations whose members are individuals while the members of a Trade Association are companies.



The proportion of trade, professional and other forms of organization were nearly identical between the 2013 and 2016 surveys and very similar in 2018. Organizations came from more than 30 different countries, including centers for international associations like the UK, Belgium and the US.

What are the major obstacles you face?

International associations face a long list of potential obstacles and challenges when trying to grow their organizations. A full half of all associations that responded to the latest survey stated that “**Defining the appropriate business model**” was a major obstacle!



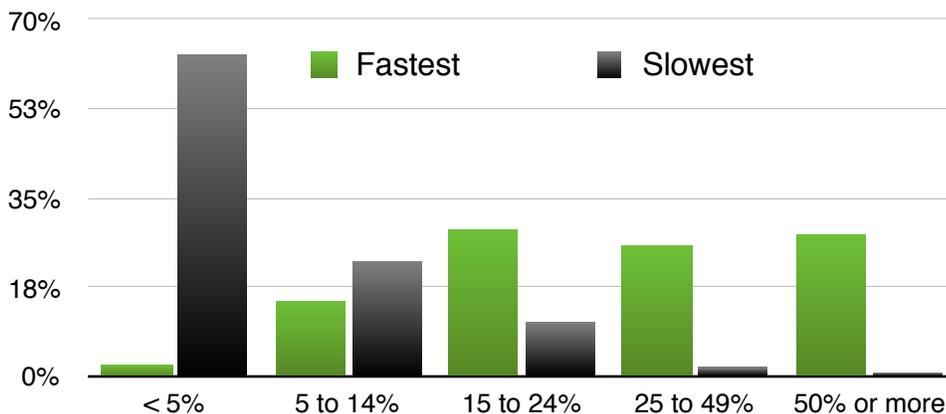
This is incredibly important since your “business model” determines how an organization sustains itself.

Other important obstacles included; a.) identifying qualified partners and suppliers, b.) accurately estimating a market’s potential, c.) legal and registration issues (e.g. GDPR), d.) Language and culture, and e.) standards and regulatory issues.

How International Are You Today?

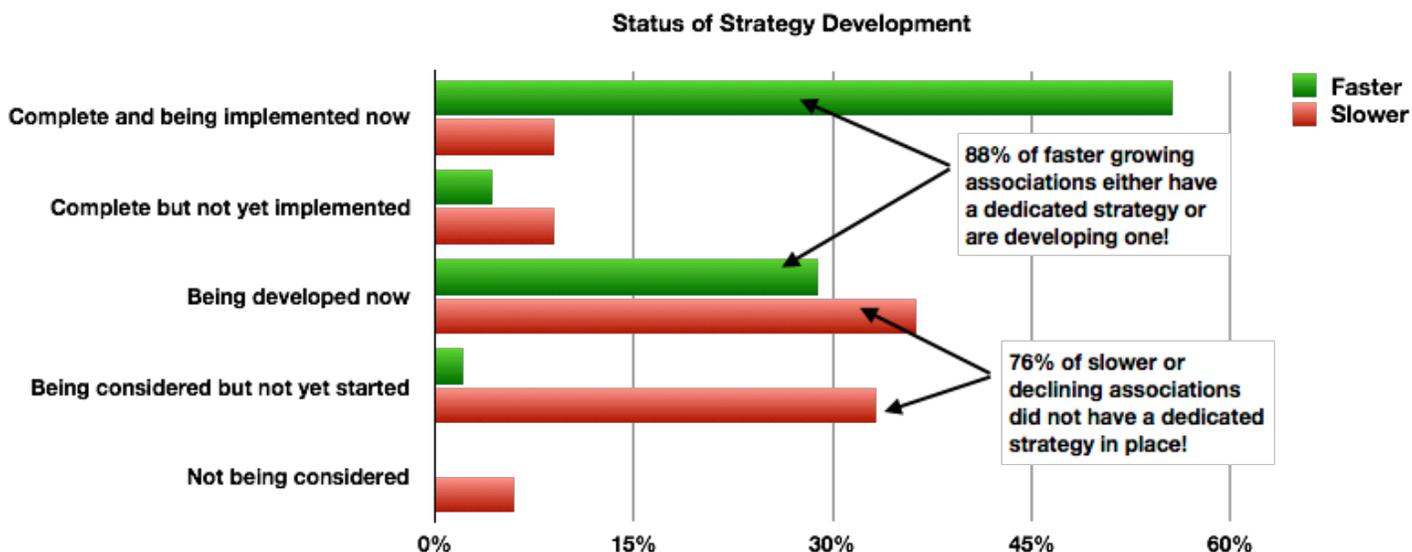
One of the areas we wanted to explore is to understand just how “international” associations are, and whether there is a difference in outcomes for those that have a more international dimension to their membership or meeting attendance? We split “faster” growing associations from the organizations that were stagnant or declining.

We can see in the graph below that the more international (members and revenue) the association, the more likely it was to experience faster overall growth .



Does a strategy make a difference?

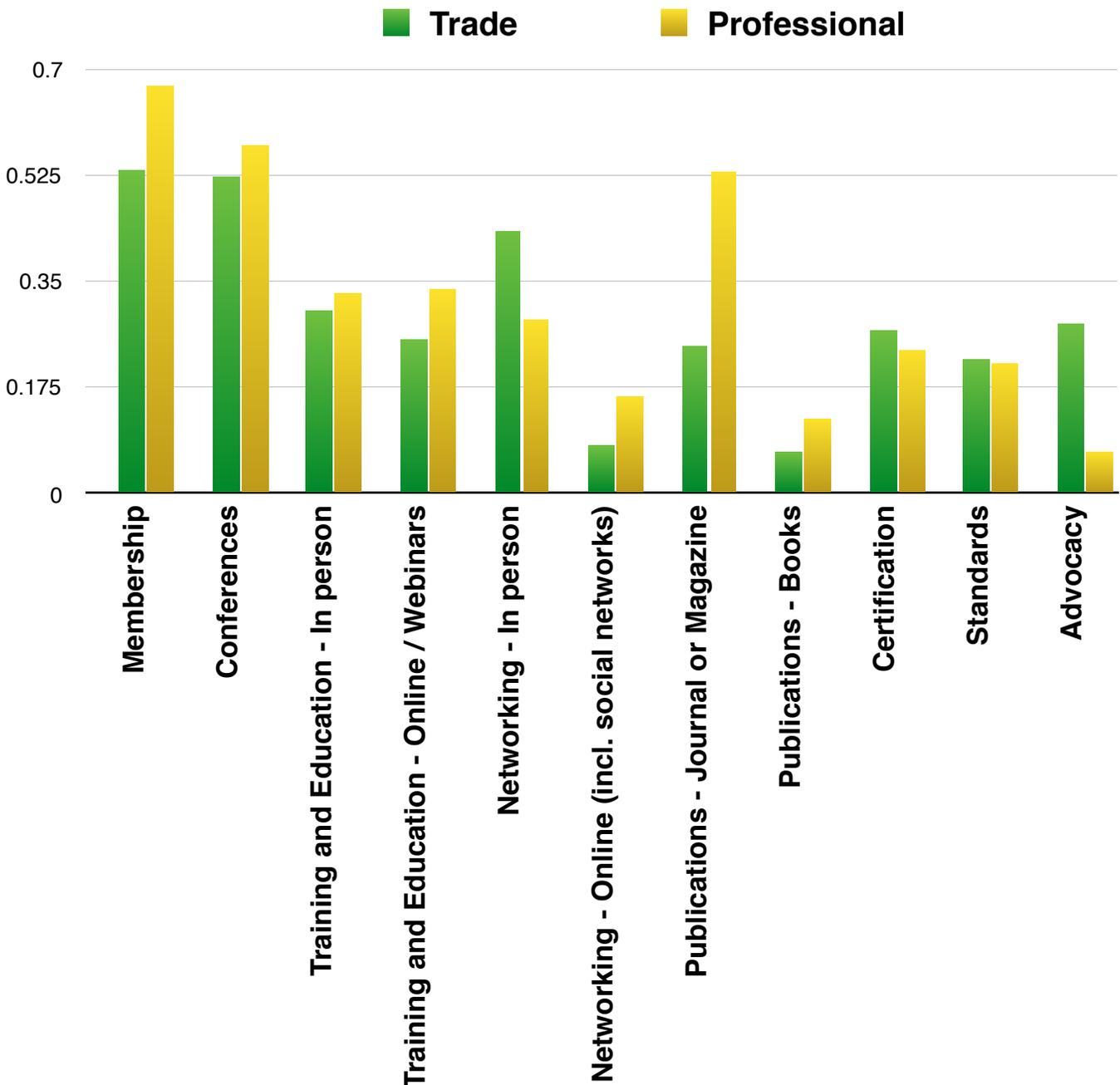
Another area we wanted to explore was whether having a dedicated international growth strategy really makes a difference?



The difference could not be more clear. Associations that not only had a strategy but that were implementing it were much more likely to experience faster growth. In fact, having a strategy was the single most important factor for successful associations, or for meeting attendance at events that are held internationally.

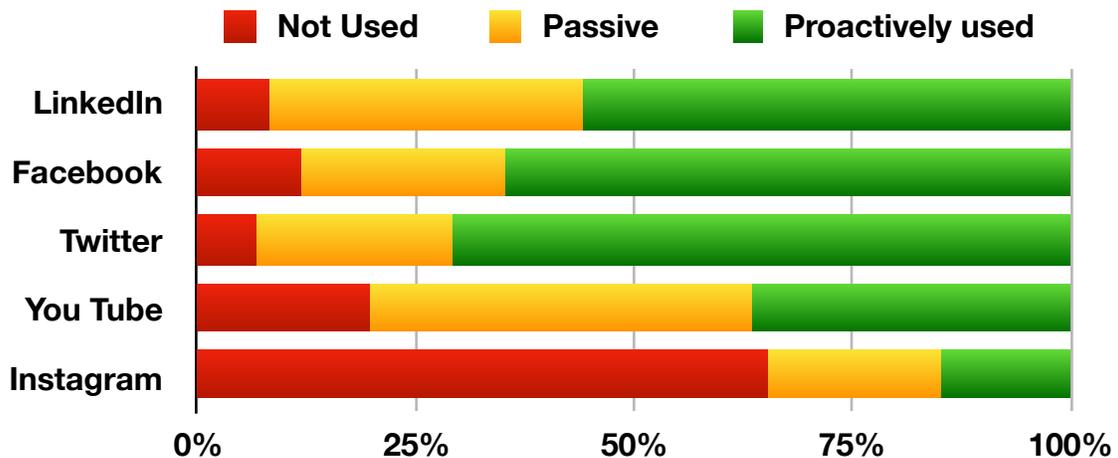
Which Products And Services Do You Lead With?

As membership organizations, it is not surprising to see that the number one product or service that organizations lead with in international markets is membership, followed by conferences. For most products and services, trade and professional associations share very similar profiles with trade associations more likely to support in-person events and professional associations leading with publications (such as a peer reviewed journal for science or medical associations).



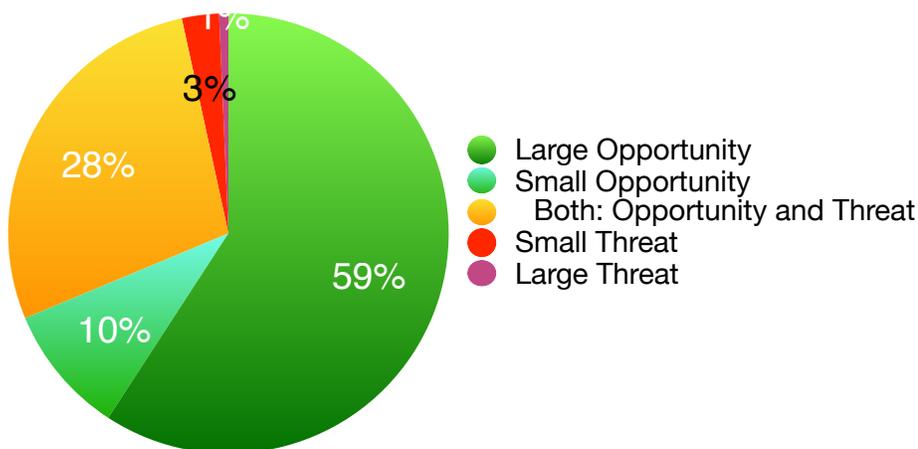
Using Social Media

One of the areas that has changed the most in the past 25 years is in the area of technology, and especially for associations, in the use of social media. Nearly every association is using some form of social media although less than 75% are using it in a “proactive” or intentional manner.



Social media channels like LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter open up unique opportunities for associations to connect with their members, and for members to connect with one another.

What Is Your Organization’s View Of Globalization?



Nearly 70% of all associations that responded viewed globalization as an opportunity with another 28% viewing it as both an opportunity and a threat.

Conclusions

Associations are entering a period of great opportunity to grow globally as the world continues to become more closely connected and as information technologies give even the smallest organizations the ability to reach members almost anywhere in the world.

This is especially true considering that the global population is projected to expand by approximately 2 billion people between now and 2050.

These surveys we have taken over the years help us to better understand how associations are approaching international development and allows other associations to learn and compare their own approaches.

We wish to thank the hundreds of association professionals that have helped to make these research reports possible.



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