

The Ways and Means

M A R K E T I N G F O R A S S O C I A T I O N S

The Rule of Seven for Membership Recruitment (and Everything Else)

The marketing Rule of Seven maintains that a potential customer or member needs to encounter a marketing message at least seven times before they're likely to take action, such as buying something or joining your association.

The Rule of Seven was discovered by the American movie industry. In the early 1930s, Hollywood discovered that one newspaper ad for a new film resulted in small audiences; two ads led to slightly larger audiences; and so on, until the peak audience was reached at around seven ads.

For associations, the Rule of Seven applies not only to membership recruiting but to any kind of marketing-recruiting employees, raising awareness, changing perceptions, building brand and selling products/services/courses.

Part 1: The Rule of Seven Guide

Marketing in 2025 is profoundly different from marketing in the 1930s, but if anything, the Rule of Seven has become even more relevant.

Each of us sees hundreds of ads and other marketing messages every day, on multiple devices. Even if a single ad does briefly catch our attention, we're likely to be pulled away by an email or text message, a phone call, our news feed, the dog barking, and on it goes.

This constant barrage of information means that your message, no matter how compelling, is competing fiercely for limited attention spans. It's no longer enough to simply deliver a message; you must ensure it cuts through the noise.

The Rule of Seven doesn't mean you should show prospects the same ad seven times on the same platform. Do that, and the prospect quickly stops seeing the ad. Instead, you want prospects to see your message expressed in multiple ways across multiple platforms.

This is where the Rule of Seven gets complicated, requiring a nuanced, multi-faceted approach to reach and engage potential members.

For most associations, digital advertising is the major means of recruiting new members. Strict privacy legislation in Canada, the US and Europe has made the use of third-party email lists legally fraught and reputationally damaging. Explicit consent is now required before a person can be added to a marketing database.

The digital advertising platforms most commonly used by professional associations to acquire members are LinkedIn, Google Search, Google Display, Facebook and YouTube. For early career professionals, we're tossing Instagram and Tik Tok into the mix.

The Digital Platforms

This section includes a table summarizing each platform's suitability for association marketing, followed by more detail on each platform.

Platform	Primary Audience / Focus	Key Strengths	Best For...	Ad Formats / Features
LinkedIn	Business to Business (B2B) Professionals	Precision targeting by job title, industry, seniority, etc.	Reaching specific professional roles and industries for membership drives	Sponsored Content, Message Ads, Dynamic Ads
Google Search	Prospects looking to purchase/join	Responds directly to stated needs	Catching prospects when they're most likely to act	Keyword bidding based on search intent
Google Display	Broad audience across the web	Brand awareness, remarketing from a website or landing page	Event-based marketing and reminding prospects who have visited your site	Text Ads, Banner Ads (especially for remarketing)
Facebook	Broad demographic (Millennials and older professionals)	Community building, detailed targeting by demographics & interests	Increasing member engagement, promoting events, reaching a wide audience	Private Groups, Events, Video Ads

Instagram	Younger demographic	Visual storytelling, high engagement	Showcasing member stories, and building your brand	Reels, Stories, User-Generated Content
TikTok	Younger demographic	High potential for viral reach, authentic content	Engaging a younger audience with short, entertaining or informative videos.	Short-form video content; algorithm favors engagement
YouTube	Broad audience (2nd largest search engine)	Video advertising, reaching users based on viewing habits	In-depth storytelling, tutorials	Video Ads

LinkedIn

You can target potential members by company, job title, geography, seniority, skills and interests.

But this precision comes at a cost: LinkedIn's Cost Per Click (CPC) can be considerably higher than for other platforms. To maximize ROI, consider diverse LinkedIn ad formats like sponsored content, message and dynamic ads.

Google Search

On this platform, advertisers bid on words or phrases that prospects are likely to use in Google searches. This requires keyword research and an understanding of search intent. It's not just about getting clicks, but getting the right clicks – from people looking for what your association offers.

Google Display

Google Display lacks the audience targeting precision of LinkedIn but can be useful for events-based marketing. For example, an association can set up a landing page about their presence at a conference or trade show and then run Google Display ads that appear when people do Google searches for the conference. Clicking on the ads takes you to a landing page.

Remarketing ads are especially effective for generating multiple prospect views. These ads follow a person after they visit your website or a specific webpage but don't take action. A person may have left the page not because it didn't interest them but because something else needed their attention. A remarketing ad is a gentle reminder.

Facebook

Facebook is an important platform for some associations, used especially for building community and reaching a broader demographic, including millennials and older professionals. It's excellent for creating events, communicating with groups, and sharing updates.

Instagram

This platform is ideal for storytelling, particularly for younger audiences (Gen Z and younger millennials). Unlike highly polished ads, successful Instagram video Reels often have a raw, authentic feel.

TikTok

TikTok is becoming indispensable for engaging with a younger audience (especially Gen Z). Its algorithm favors engaging content over follower count, meaning even smaller associations can go viral with the right content. The focus is on short, authentic videos that are entertaining, informative, or inspiring.

YouTube

As the second-largest search engine globally, YouTube is the optimal platform for video advertising. Advertisers can target by age, gender, parental status and household income, or by interests, habits, and lifestyle.

Part 2: The Rule of Seven Checklist

Use this checklist to ensure your marketing strategy is hitting all the necessary touchpoints.

Define your target audience:

- Who are you trying to reach?

- What are their wants and needs that your association can address?

- Who do they trust for recommendations?

Identify your core message:

- What is the primary benefit of joining your association?

- What unique value do you offer?

When they see your marketing materials, what do you want your audience to:

THINK: (one sentence)

FEEL: (one sentence)

DO: (one sentence)

Which channels will you use to reach prospects?

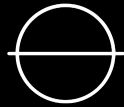
- ☐ Website/landing page
- ☐ LinkedIn
- ☐ Google Search Ads
- ☐ Google Display Ads
- ☐ Facebook
- ☐ Instagram
- ☐ TikTok
- ☐ YouTube
- ☐ Public Relations (media mentions, expert op-eds)
- ☐ Trade Shows, Events (Exhibiting, Speaking)
- ☐ Word of mouth & referrals (referral program, testimonials)
- ☐ Other: _____

About Us

The Ways and Means is a marketing agency focused exclusively on helping associations and other membership-based organizations achieve their marketing and business goals.

Why associations? Because what you do truly matters. You uphold standards, tackle big policy challenges, and spark innovation.

Our team has poured their decades of experience and insights into developing a suite of resources that address common marketing challenges and opportunities faced by associations. We're offering these resources so that even when we can't work side-by-side with your association, we can still contribute to your continued success and growth.



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