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Innovation & Trends Expert  
Jim Carroll

**“What do association executives  
need to think about for 2004?”**



*Reflections on future  
trends and issues that will  
affect your membership*



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## “Issues of 2004 and beyond. . .”

*Futurist, trends & innovation expert Jim Carroll regularly speaks on trends, the future, innovation and change. This article, written for several online association newsletters, provides his insight on what he thinks will be the major issues affecting organizations in the coming years..*

We all know that the members of our associations continue to find themselves in an often perilous state, challenged by ever-increasing degrees of competition or constant new complexities, regular change, new education and knowledge requirements, not to mention ongoing uncertainty about the world around us.

Yet sorting through the trends that might impact us can be a challenge at best. From my perspective, there are at least nine major issues that association executives should starting thinking about as we head into 2004.

### **A knowledge transfer strategy**

The most pressing issue for your members through the next decade is going to come from the increasing pace of retirement within their organizations.

As this happens, a lot of important corporate knowledge is simply going to “walk out the door,” and your members must start to prepare for this eventuality.

*“a lot of important corporate knowledge is simply going to “walk out the door””*

The first wave of baby boomers is approaching retirement age, and the result is that we will see an ever-increasing number of founding partners, managers, senior executives and staff move on. A lot of important internal knowledge with respect to operations, strategy, markets, products and services will be lost

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forever if an organization doesn't ensure that their knowledge is passed on to the next generation of leaders and staff.

That's why knowledge retention and knowledge transfer will be the most critical issue that you will need to start preparing your members for.

They will need to learn about the nature of the challenge they are faced with, and the practical methods and strategies that they can adopt to minimize risk and maximize results. More specifically, they will need awareness and guidance on the issue of "knowledge succession planning" in the short term, and how to implement full-blown knowledge transfer programs subsequent to that.

This means that as an association executive, you should now take the time now to educate yourself on the nature of the knowledge challenges that your members might be faced with in the coming decade, and the methods that you might use to help them plan and cope with this challenging new reality.

### **"Change courage"**

Whether you represent an industry or a profession, the pace of change affecting your members continues to accelerate at a furious pace, and you will need to ensure that they can understand the change that might occur, the implications of that change upon their professional and corporate lives. This means that one of your key roles will be helping them develop the skills that will let them cope with incessant, ongoing change, and turn change from a challenge into an opportunity.

*"your members are struggling with issues that they might not even have dreamed about just a few years ago"*

If you think about it, we are living in a period of time of unprecedented change, with rapid market and product developments, furiously challenging new forms of competition, and ever more rapid innovation. Then there is the change that is being driven by unforeseen external events – such as a new focus on ethics, Sarbanes-Oxley financial reporting, and a worldwide focus on security issues, to name but a few. The result is that the skills, capabilities and knowledge requirements that are now expected of people are no longer static, since everything changes almost overnight.

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Add it all up, and your members are struggling with issues that they might not even have dreamed about just a few years ago. They're being hammered relentlessly by change, and many of them might be ill-prepared to cope.

That's why your role will continue to take on the issue of 'change' as one of ever increasing importance. You will need to be a "change agent" for them, educating them on the unique change issues and trends that are affecting them. You'll need to be a "change manager," helping them to cope with ongoing change by focusing on change in your newsletters, conferences, meetings and events.

And you should help provide them the ability of being "change leaders," wherein they can become experts in their own right in navigating their organizations safely through the shoals of change which are tossing them about.

### **Tactical to strategic transition**

Most associations are discovering that there is a rapid need to help effect a transition of the skills and roles of their members from those that are tactical, to a more strategic role. Given the impact of change, companies and organizations need more assistance than ever before in defining strategy, as well as translating strategy into action

*Middle managers -- can they provide the additional assistance that can help the organization in this world of incessant change?*

And it seems that to this point in time, they aren't getting a lot of help in doing so. That's because there exists within organizations a big disconnect between management and their staff. A recent survey of several major organizations found that only 12% of senior business executives believe that a majority of their staff understand the company's business strategy. If there was ever an indicator for how many people are failing to cope with the change swirling around them, and are mired in a tactical role, it is certainly found in that statistic!

No where might this tactical focus be more pronounced than with middle management – individuals who might excel at "pushing paper around, assembling reports, managing meetings. Yes, they do what needs to be done to help an organization function and manage – but can they provide the additional assistance that can help the organization in this world of incessant change. If they can't, then they might not be bringing the value that is required to the organization.

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Hence, one of the key roles for an association to deal with is to help their members understand how they can bridge this disconnect by playing a more strategic role within the organization. This means learning the essence of how to bring strategic value to an organization, by helping in one of three ways.

- Run the business better: how can they help the organization achieve cost savings and/or efficiencies through their activities?
- Grow the business: how can they help their organization attain competitive advantage and/or revenue enhancement through what they do?
- Transform the business: how can they help in the achievement of other core business goals?

If they can enhance their skills so that they can provide these services to the organization, then they are successfully effecting a change from a tactical to a strategic role.

Can it be done? By all means – for example, at BASF, HR professionals once spent 62% of time on clerical work, but are now focused on everything from career development to acquisition integration, activities that are far more strategic – and far more useful – to the organization for which they work.

### **Attract younger members**

Another interesting challenge that you will be faced with comes from the fact that if you are like many other organizations, you are now witnessing slower rates of growth of membership among younger people, and perhaps less involvement in your association by those members who are below the age of 30. The issues of member attraction, and member relevance, are increasingly becoming front and center as a new generation takes on a greater role in the workforce.

The challenge for you comes from the fact that many young people of today are not necessarily joiners; they're not convinced of the value that comes from belonging to a group of their peers. That's because of the unique world in which they've grown up. In their hyper-wired, ever-connected world, young people of today –their viewpoints, issues, opinions and activism are often global, not local.

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*They might think there is far more relevance from participating in a global Weblog than from attending your national conference.*

They might care more about issues of free trade in developing countries than they might care about your efforts to increase visibility of your profession. They might spend more time networking with far-flung friends on chat-lines than in developing valuable professional relationships through the networking events held by your association. They might think there is far more relevance from participating in a global Weblog than from attending your national conference.

And many of them continue to reject the traditional career path of long term jobs with large organizations, instead establishing themselves in small, micro-organizations that can provide needed skills to a corporate audience regardless of where they might be. Hence, they might not even be in an organization that your current membership outreach activities take into account.

Their unique perspective on the world – a world that is ever-smaller, tightly linked together, and always available – means that it is likely that you will have to work harder to provide them with a membership role and membership benefits that are far more relevant to their needs and concerns.

You can only do this if you truly understand who they are, and how they think. That's why it might be a good time to take a look at the composition of your association board. If the average age is over 40, you've got the wrong mix of talent. This might be the year to recruit at least two or three young people to your board, in order to be able to tap their insight. After all, they will be the future of your association, and it is critical that you get them involved now.

## Partnerships

It's likely that one of the most challenging issues for your association members is that of "making partnerships work."

*It might be time for a joint conference that involves your own members as well as those of the various groups and associations that are close partners to your association or industry*

The increasing complexity of technology and business has meant that it is impossible for any one organization or person to do it all. Given the growing

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complexity of the world around us, successful organizations are learning that they must focus on their core competencies, and seek partners to assist them in many other areas.

That's why the partnership issue continues to be an important one. Your members need ongoing insight into leading-edge trends, such as where effective partnerships have made the difference between failure and success; successful methods in managing partnerships; how to provide for a successful outsourcing process; how to make partnerships work; and countless other issues.

As you assist your members with the partnership process, don't restrict yourself to those issues -- you might also consider introducing the partnership issue in a variety of other ways.

For example, it might be time for a joint conference that involves your own members as well as those of the various groups and associations that are close partners to your association or industry. You might consider the need for task-forces and working groups involving your own team and other partners that will examine the unique challenges and issues that are coming about as partnership takes on a greater role.

In other words, you need to weave into your organizational dynamics the same type of partnership issues that your members are currently grappling with.

### **Dealing with communication dysfunction.**

It might also be time to help your members out of the technical morass in which they are now finding themselves.

The last ten years have seen a remarkable level of connectivity emerge – we're wired with cell phones, Blackberries, PDA's and countless other devices. People are always on, always connected, and always available.

*One British survey found that at least two out of three people will answer a cell-phone call while they are in the bathroom!*

The results are quite dramatic – people are working harder than ever before, from an increasing number of locations. They're time shifting their day, start-

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ing work at home in the morning with a home-based PC, continuing to work during their commute, spending a full working day in which they're plugged in and turned on – and doing it all over again on the way home, before checking out their e-mail again just before they go to bed.

Obviously, we're now in a world in which people are working from everywhere and anywhere, at any time, in any circumstance. And maybe we're getting carried away – after all, one British survey found that at least two out of three people will answer a cell-phone call while they are in the bathroom!

That's why the issue of work/life balance continues to be an important, but with an entirely different spin – how do we provide for work/life balance in the digital age?

Associations need to put into perspective the lifestyle, management and social issues and challenges that are coming about because of our willing acceptance of the 24/7 work world. What cultural barriers might exist within organizations that could prevent a much needed slow down? What are the health care costs that come from the increased stress that comes from never getting a break from office issues? It might be an opportune time to challenge your members with the issues, and determine how their own organizations might respond.

### **Increased value in the annual event**

An interesting twist to the world of technology is that despite the speed at which communications now take place, there is less human contact than ever before in the workplace. That's why there's an even greater need than ever to bring people together, to create and share the passion, and build relationships.

Sure, it's important that you explore and implement the full range of distance learning, video education and other capabilities. There are far too many opportunities to transform the way member education is provided through technology.

Yet as you do so, you need to keep in mind that right now, people can feel disconnected. They can miss out on any passion, and can lose focus by being out of touch by living in a technological world. Which means that in today's age, the annual event and other association events are more important together.

After all, in a world of e-mail, fax, cellphone connectivity and other methods of communication, it is all too easy for people who share an area of focus to



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lose sight of important objectives, lose their ability to share information about the trends and issues that are affecting them, or to learn from the simple value of networking.

That's why there's an even greater need than ever to bring people together, to create and share the passion, and build relationships, as found with your annual event and other meetings.

### **Strategic events**

Of course, our complex world also means that you probably need to bring your members together more frequently than ever before.

*You will have a pressing need for far more strategic events, often arranged at short notice, to deal with issues of pressing concern.*

Indeed, the days of the one, big annual convention blowout are gone. In a world of constant and rapid change, you'll need to bring together your membership for strategic education purposes. If you think about it, a world of constant knowledge growth implies a world of constant change – and constant change demands regular knowledge transfer, often at events and meetings.

A good example is what happened with SARS – an unforeseen world even created a pressing need for many medical meetings to be held, to educate health care administrators on unique and challenging circumstances in dealing with SARS: for medical professionals to learn about the latest knowledge and research on SARS; for emergency medical personnel to understand the unique issues in transportation of SARS patients. All of which might have involved a need for an urgent education-based meeting or event.

Use that as your barometer for your meeting and event future – you will have a pressing need for far more strategic events, often arranged at short notice, to deal with issues of pressing concern. Call it “just-in-time meetings,” if you will. If this is to be our reality, then as an association executive you'd better learn how to translate this potential new reality into action.

### **Contingency planning**

Last but not least, you'll continue to be faced with the issue of planning for a world of uncertainty.

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Events of the last few years have taught us that surprise might be the dominant force affecting our future. Every association executive – and indeed, every member – must become masters in all the nuances of preparing for constant surprise.

That's why education and training in the issue of contingency planning will continue to be a hot button throughout 2004. Everything we've learned suggests that we must now plan to deal with the unexpected. The law of unforeseen actions which has come about means that we've shifted away from the predictive future, to the massively unpredictable future.

We've got to work hard to try to plan for multiple scenarios, multiple contingencies, multiple plans. It is something that most people have never been trained for – and they sure as heck need to be trained for it now.

After all, anything can happen.

### **Jim Carroll, FCA**

As a trends and innovation expert, Jim Carroll spends a great deal of time in helping organizations cope with the change that swirls around him.

As a leading international futurist, innovation and trends expert, Jim dedicates his time and expertise to making organizations and their people ready and able to adopt tomorrow, today. Since 1992, Jim Carroll has spoken to tens of thousands of people as a conference opening and/or closing keynote speaker, or a workshop/seminar leader in over 1,000 presentations.

His clients include many of the world's leading organizations, such as the American Federation of Teachers, Microsoft, American Express, the American Payroll Association, Taiwan Semiconductor Mfg. Co., VISA, Electronic Transaction Assn, Blue Cross/Blue Shield, KPMG, the office of the Prime Minister of Hungary, and more.



Jim has written 34 books that have sold in excess of 750,000 copies worldwide, as well as over 600 articles for a wide variety of national and international publications.

An extensive Web site containing information about Jim, including video, client references, and other information, can be found at [www.jimcarroll.com](http://www.jimcarroll.com).