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WHERE SWST STANDS AND WHERE SHOULD IT GO? PROVIDING MEMBER VALUE

Considering that the price of getting a new customer is estimated at about 10 times that of maintaining a current customer, knowing how to deliver customer value consistently and repeatedly may be the best investment a company can make. This concept is directly applicable to professional societies and their members. In this issue of *Wood and Fiber Science* are the results of a survey conducted to better understand SWST member perceptions of the services provided to them by SWST. These perceptions directly translate into what members perceive to be of value to them. Members in a sense are SWST customers and, as such, demand value from their membership in the Society.

So, what is customer value? In many organizations, including professional societies, customer value is a poorly understood concept, and many entities do not understand that it is the customers who drive the value creation process. Phil Kotler, noted marketing scholar, defines customer value as the difference between the values the customer gains from owning and using a product/service and the costs of obtaining the product/service. Closely related to value is satisfaction. Kotler views customer satisfaction as the extent to which a product's perceived performance matches a buyer's expectations. If the product's performance falls short of expectations, the buyer is dissatisfied. If performance matches or exceeds expectations, the buyer is satisfied or delighted.

Is creating member value difficult? According to Association Xpertise, Inc., many associations are preoccupied with *stuff*. They have, to varying degrees, lost their focus and direction. They point to the Drucker Foundation's *Self-Assessment Tool*, which identifies five key

questions that every not-for profit organization should ask and answer as part of a self-assessment exercise:

1. What is our mission?
2. Who is our customer?
3. What does the customer value?
4. What are our results?
5. What is our plan?

Professional societies like the Society of Wood Science and Technology need to determine the needs, wants, and interests of its members and deliver the desired satisfactions effectively and efficiently. The member survey is but the first step in crafting an effective strategy. More important is the execution of the strategy. The survey results reveal what members perceive to be of value to them. The results also indicate that members are not identical with identical needs. Segmentation of the membership should be done so that focus can be provided on the needs unique to each member group.

I will conclude with where I started, with value. Member value is determined from the members' points of view. It doesn't matter how valuable the management or board of directors think the membership offering is if the members do not share their view. The onus is on the Society to deliver the goods.

RICHARD P. VLOSKY

*Louisiana Forest Products
Development Center
School of Renewable Natural
Resources
Louisiana State University
Agricultural Center
Baton Rouge, LA*