

Getting Good Data

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Getting good data is about making sure the information your bar has on record about its members is accurate and useful. This may sound like a simple matter, but as most bar executives know, it is far from it.

To effectively capture, store and utilize good data a bar needs to integrate more than the technology that manages it. A bar needs to integrate departmental processes and priorities within their organizations. On the surface it might appear to be an issue for one department; either IT or communications or maybe member services. But what is needed is an integrated approach, combining the efforts of many or all departments to insure that a bar is indeed getting good data throughout its entire processes.

Why You Care

A bar can get by with mediocre data, but over time that will cause headaches and increasing operational costs. Some obvious areas of concern:

Communications: Many times it is the communications department that feels the most pain from poor data. Their job is making sure members are aware of bar services, events and benefits. Poor data makes it very hard to carry out those duties.

Dues Collection: Not knowing who your members are and where they live and/or work means getting them a dues notice is problematic.

Online Services: As you allow and conduct more transactions online, knowing who your members are becomes vitally important. First, bad data means no transactions with a member. Second, poor data raises the risk of fraud. If you don't know who is or isn't a member, you don't know who you are doing business with.

What you should do

The first and most important tool in a bar's tool-box is good policy. Policy drives operations. An executive director should be driving this from the top down so that each bar department is practicing "safe data" captures. You should create a culture where getting good data is a priority.

A traditional approach for achieving good data is limiting data input to select groups or individuals to simplify the enforcement of data standards. Fewer people typically means fewer variations in input and better, more consistent data. This is still a good idea, but with technology innovations data input is becoming highly distributed; to the point that members are inputting data. With more complex technology, comes a need for more complex methods for ensuring quality data.

How you can do it

Practically speaking most, if not all of a bar's data is captured, stored and delivered with technology. This means technology can serve as a tool for improving the quality of data. This can happen at capture and during its actual use. For example, technology can limit the options during input down to only qualified (validated) data. Drop down lists can even drive members to input their own data correctly. Once information is already captured, database tools can be used to 'clean up' bad data. By comparing and normalizing data within specified fields, technology can serve as means of automating data quality.

Conclusion

Good data is critical to the operations of every bar association. And with technology taking a more central role in operations, its role is becoming even more important. Technology is obviously a tool for improving the quality of a bar's data, but its use must be driven and managed by good policies. By developing an integrated solution to the problem, a bar greatly improves its chances of getting good data.