

## What Do Members Really Want?

### Installment II

This article is the second installment about the research SPE has conducted and the conclusions we've drawn to answer the question "what do members really want and expect from SPE?" The first installment was published in last month's Leadership E-News and outlined the research techniques and specific studies SPE HQ has utilized and continues to utilize on an ongoing basis. This article will outline the key conclusions, based on the research, that SPE is using in the creation of its strategies and programs.

SPE's leadership focused its exploration of what members really want by doing what is known as a "needs-based assessment." The analysis looked at all of the survey information and research we had about what members and potential members told us they want and/or expect from SPE, and grouped this data into "baskets" of similar needs. After a good deal of drilling and refining, SPE was able to derive a matrix of what is wanted by whom, providing us a macro-view of our total membership. The distilled matrix with which SPE is currently working is shown below. It divides the membership into three macro-groups based on similar needs or expectations.

Needs Based Segment	Needs
<b>Technology Developer (Theoretical)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• R&amp;D Scientists</li> <li>• Academia, including students</li> <li>• Materials Scientists</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to publish and establish technology leadership, renown and prestige via independent, peer-review process</li> <li>• Ability to network with other like-minded scientists</li> <li>• Ability to network with engineers who commercialize their innovations</li> <li>• Ability to learn about the latest technical innovations</li> </ul>
<b>Technology User/Applier (Practical)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Industry and End-User OEMs</li> <li>• Product Development Engineers &amp; Designers</li> <li>• Process/Manufacturing Engineers</li> <li>• Materials Applications Engineers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to apply new technologies with an eye toward gaining a competitive advantage</li> <li>• Ability to publish to establish technology leadership</li> <li>• Ability to network with suppliers to learn about the most innovative plastics technologies</li> </ul>
<b>Technology Tracker</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sales Engineers</li> <li>• Technical Managers</li> <li>• Market Research Specialists</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be visible and connected with technical customers</li> <li>• Be aware of the latest market trends about plastics technology advances</li> </ul>

Based on these needs, SPE has articulated that it is in the business of providing the following:

- 1) *Technical information* or content about plastics (from fundamentals to advanced sciences),
- 2) Venues (publishing, conferences, online forums, etc.) that *promote technical exchange* for people within the plastics industry, and
- 3) *Mechanisms for people to develop lifelong professional networks* to help them in their current jobs and career paths (online member directories, Division lists, Section lists, etc.).

SPE conducted regular surveys via SPE's E-Bulletin over the past year to test some of these assumptions. While these surveys do not provide the type of controls needed to "prove" these ideas, they can provide indicative data to help us see if we are on the right track. In all of these surveys, "*access to quality technical information*" continuously rises to the top of the expectations lists. The following survey results from last month's E-Bulletin are pretty typical. In this survey, SPE polled its members with the question "What information or services would you like to see from your technical Division?" The response was an open field text, so people could respond any way they wanted to the question. We had over 100 responses, which we grouped into areas as follows:

- Information Exchange with other Members – 10%
- Specific technical information from their Division – 62%
- Online delivery of technical information – 7%
- General industry or historical information on plastics – 14%
- Other – 7%

Of the 62% who wanted more specific technical information, we did a further grouping within that subset as follows:

- General Technical Information – 27 respondents (or approximately 25% of total population)
- Fundamental Technical Information – 15 respondents (14%)
- New Technology – 16 respondents (14%)
- Troubleshooting – 10 respondents (9%)

In response to this and other data, SPE headquarters is constantly reviewing its offerings and trying to find new ways to generate and distribute technical information, as well as promote technical exchanges and networking.

Recent additions to SPE's offerings include full free online access for members only to ANTEC proceedings back to 1998. As of result of the survey above, we are re-crafting the monthly E-Bulletins to include more technical information and perhaps make the E-Bulletin less generic and more Division specific. We are again re-evaluating the editorial focus of *Plastics Engineering* magazine and re-thinking how we offer fundamentals information via online and traditional mechanisms.

New technical community development (via Sub-Divisions, SIGs or new Divisions) is also a key area being explored to ensure that SPE remains a dynamic organism that accurately reflects the industry's technical priorities. SPE is, therefore, testing interest levels in creating new communities and conferencing for topics such as nanotechnology, micro-molding, bio-based plastics, green construction, radio frequency identification (RFID), and polymer use in fuel cell technologies, to name a few.

One technique SPE HQ uses to evaluate how well our activities and programs meet the needs of our members is illustrated in the exercise below. I challenge each Section and Division board to utilize this tool. It allows you to look at each activity your group does and evaluate it to better understand the genuine value it brings to each member segment. When the results of each

activity evaluation are stacked up and looked at from the target audience perspective, you can begin to identify gaps and see your activities more accurately from a member viewpoint.

Start with the question “How well does \_\_\_\_\_(my Section newsletter, my Division website, our TopCon program, our community outreach programs, etc.) satisfy the following audiences?”

Assign a value to each box within the matrix (I usually use something easy like 0-3 representing “not at all”, “low”, “medium”, “high”). Give each activity a total score for each member group (add across the matrix), and then list all of the activities by group and score to see where there are important gaps in services or programs. Many activities will fulfill more than one category for more than one audience, but rarely do they do so to the same extent. Chances are if SPE, within each Section or Division, is not filling out the matrix so that these three basic criteria are being consistently met for each member group, then people within our industry will not see the value of SPE.

	Generates and Delivers technical Information about plastics to members	Promotes technical exchange amongst members	Provides mechanisms for members to develop lifelong networks
Technology Developers			
Technology Users/Apppliers			
Technology Trackers			

Just using this language to talk about value and brainstorm additional ideas for activities or services is very useful. Things that don’t rate high on the matrix should be improved to rate higher or dropped, or done only as a secondary project after member needs are well met.

This member needs analysis essentially defines for us what our brand image should be to each of our three audiences. Branding is the single-most powerful way SPE can market itself to members, potential members, companies and other stakeholders. A poor or confused brand image is hard to overcome in today’s marketplace. The next article (May issue) in this series examines how SPE manages its brand today, and what we collectively need to do if we are to genuinely brand ourselves globally in the future.