INNOVATIONS, BENEFITS AND PRODUCTS THAT ARE SIMPLE TO UNDERSTAND AND USE WILL BE ADOPTED MORE OFTEN THAN THOSE THAT ARE DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND OR USE. ANYONE REMEMBER USING PCs BEFORE WINDOWS? THE ADOPTION RATE OF PERSONAL COMPUTERS INCREASED DRAMATICALLY WHEN USER INTERFACES BECAME MORE VISUAL AND EASIER TO USE.

needs of potential users. In general, an innovation that is compatible with existing concepts and expectations is less threatening to potential users and is more likely to be adopted.

For associations, a potential consequence of low compatibility is the failure of electronic publications. In his 2000 marketingprofs.com article "The Problems with E-Books," Alan Weiss used the issue of compatibility to argue that e-books would probably not be more than a small niche technology for a long time. Seven years later, his prediction has proven to be correct. E-books have some degree of relative advantage in their convenience, but the experience of reading long articles or books on a computer screen is just not relaxing or comfortable.

Nonetheless, there is a place in the association community for carefully planned electronic publications. This year, the Giving USA Foundation successfully released an online version of *i in S*, the annual report on charitable giving in the United States. The online version features several relative advantages over the printed version of the books, such as search features and portability. Just as important, however, the online version is compatible with the experiences and needs of existing and potential customers.

"We knew that for the most part existing users of the book did not sit down and read the book cover to cover," says Sharon Bond, senior marketing manager of the Giving USA Foundation. "It was more typical for our users to search the book for specific data patterns or trends. Also, users of the book were familiar with other searchable online publications that were data-oriented."

3. COMPLEXITY

Complexity is the degree to which an innovation is perceived as difficult to understand and use. Innovations, benefits and products that are simple to understand and use will be adopted more often than those that are difficult to understand or use. Anyone remember using PCs before Windows? The adoption rate of personal computers increased dramatically when user interfaces became more visual and easier to use.

A major way associations can overcome this barrier is education — demonstrating a new tool or benefit at a conference or trade show, for example. Several associations also offer webinars for new and continuing members to decrease the complexity associated with their benefits, products and membership experience.

4. TRIALABILITY

Trialability is the degree to which an innovation may be experimented on a limited basis. Research has shown that those new products or innovations that can be used first on a trial basis are generally adopted more rapidly than products or innovations that are not available on a trial basis. Trial versions of software, GPS navigation systems in rental cars, and demonstration of new benefits at trade shows all are designed to increase trialability and rates of adoption. Many associations also use trial memberships to get new members in the door.

5. OBSERVABILITY

Observability is the degree to which the results of an innovation are visible to others. Many people are more likely to adopt highly visible new products such as SUVs or satellite televisions if they observe their neighbors using them. Associations have used observability for years at conferences and trade shows in the form of buttons or ribbons proclaiming someone is a new member, has just tried a new product, or has just visited a specific booth on the show floor.

Association professionals who understand the role of these five factors will be well-positioned to bring innovation to their organizations. Most importantly, they can make sure these innovative new products and services ultimately are adopted and used. ⬛

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