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## Associations Take Members Beyond Networking

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Professionals sometimes make a critical mistake in their careers: they neglect to join their industry associations. After investing time and money in a university education or training program, they disregard the value of continued education, advocacy and other assistance that associations provide. With so much at stake in these difficult times, why would anyone want to go it alone?

Associations were created by people who saw the need for banding together to fight for common values and interests affecting their industry. While this is still the primary reason most people join, modern associations provide much more than they did in their early days.

**Advocacy.** For some, this is the most important service an association provides. Professionals can't be everywhere and still run their business or advance their career; they need someone to advocate for them at the political table. A collective voice is more powerful than unaligned individuals, and more members mean greater representation and bargaining power. But an organization is only as strong as the number of members represented. This idea is summed up by a restaurant industry saying: "Be at the table or be on the menu; your choice."

**Legal Interpretation.** Associations help professionals, especially those new to business, navigate the bureaucratic and regulatory environment specific to their industry. For example, hiring and employment laws often vary by trade. Associations assist by providing clarity that can help business owners operate within their industry regulations and avoid legal trouble.

**Best Practices.** Associations keep members in touch with their local, national and international colleagues, from whom industry best practices can be learned. Forums for peer-to-peer learning and sharing are provided by associations through conferences, tradeshow, and other industry events.

**Discounts.** Because of their size, many associations are able to negotiate discounts and lower prices from industry and outside vendors.

**Competitive Edge.** Some say an individual's professionalism is measured by his or her commitment to continuing education on critical industry topics. Professionalism is paramount to staying on top of the competition. Keeping abreast of industry regulations and trends only happens through associations.

**Education.** In industries that require professional certification, associations play an important role by providing the classes and workshops required to keep certificates in force. When certification isn't necessary, associations educate members on new developments in their industry.

Professional associations are owned by members and run by directors who continually strive to improve industry conditions with members' best interests in mind. Joining should be an easy decision, though some are willing to let others pay the tab. As President Theodore Roosevelt said, "Every man owes a part of his time and money to the business or industry in which he is engaged. No man has a moral right to withhold his support from an organization that is striving to improve conditions within his sphere."

Ultimately, the people that benefit most are those who get involved with their industry association and make use of the programs and other benefits membership entitles them to.

For more information about the New Mexico Restaurant Association, visit [www.nmrestaurants.org](http://www.nmrestaurants.org).

*Finance New Mexico is an initiative of the New Mexico Small Business Investment Corporation (NMSBIC) and its partners to assist individuals and businesses in obtaining skills and funding-resources for their business or idea. To learn more, go to [www.FinanceNewMexico.org](http://www.FinanceNewMexico.org).*

