



Marketing Automation for Associations


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When email became a viable means of mass communication, member organizations immediately saw the potential and were early adopters. The content associations provide to members — including events, newsletters, and other publications — is one of their main value propositions. With email, associations could more efficiently deliver content to their members and prospects with minimal overhead. It was a natural fit.

Now, marketing automation is an accepted reality across every industry, with segment-focused targeting, personalization, and customization swiftly becoming the norm. Unfortunately, most associations have largely failed to update their marketing programs to address this new reality, relying instead on old school “batch and blast” tactics.





Associations need to evolve their approach and deliver more targeted, customized content to better serve the needs of their members and generate greater engagement. Doing this will require moving beyond manual processes and embracing a more efficient, targeted, and automated approach.

Association Email vs. the Modern Inbox

Email is still the primary workhorse for the digital marketer, and specifically associations, for good reason. Email is more effective than other digital channels at acquiring customers and driving conversions, and is the preferred method of contact for most members.

Most associations treat their emails like newspapers, with every subscriber receiving the same content. This is easy for the association marketer, but means their members spend precious time hunting for the content that is most relevant and interesting to them. Or, more likely, they skip to another message in their inbox that captures their attention.

Association marketers need to realize the modern inbox has become a battleground for all marketers, and their competitors are not just competitor associations, but every single other company also emailing members. These include laser focused specialists — such as Netflix and Groupon — who know how to deliver content that is hyper-customized to the interests of their subscribers.

To make things more complicated, the target for which you're competing — your reader's attention — is growing ever smaller. The average adult's attention span is about 8 seconds¹.



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¹ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/science/2016/03/12/humans-have-shorter-attention-span-than-goldfish-thanks-to-smart/>

Associations need to remember their member groups are made up of individuals

While they may have all come together for a common reason, your members are unique human beings with different needs and interests. Rather than sending the same generic email to every member and hoping for the best, associations have to hit their members with a one-two combo: seize their attention with a compelling subject line and then deliver with relevant content that members want to read, share, and interact with. That's how you hook the modern reader in a crowded inbox.

The good news is you don't need to be Amazon or Microsoft to do it. You just need the right tools to:

1 →

Segment your audience

2 →

Deliver appropriate content to each

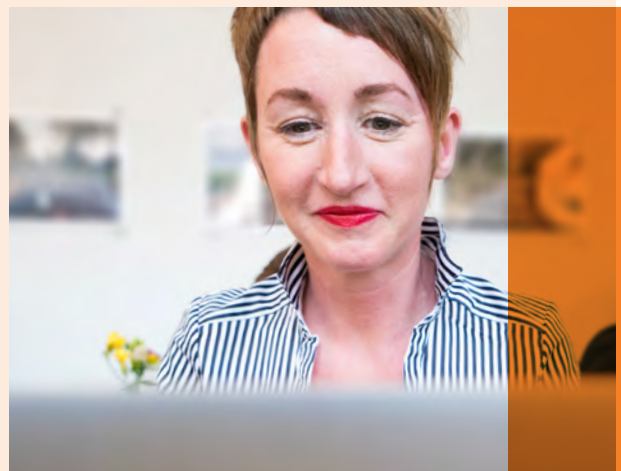
MEMBER SEGMENTATION

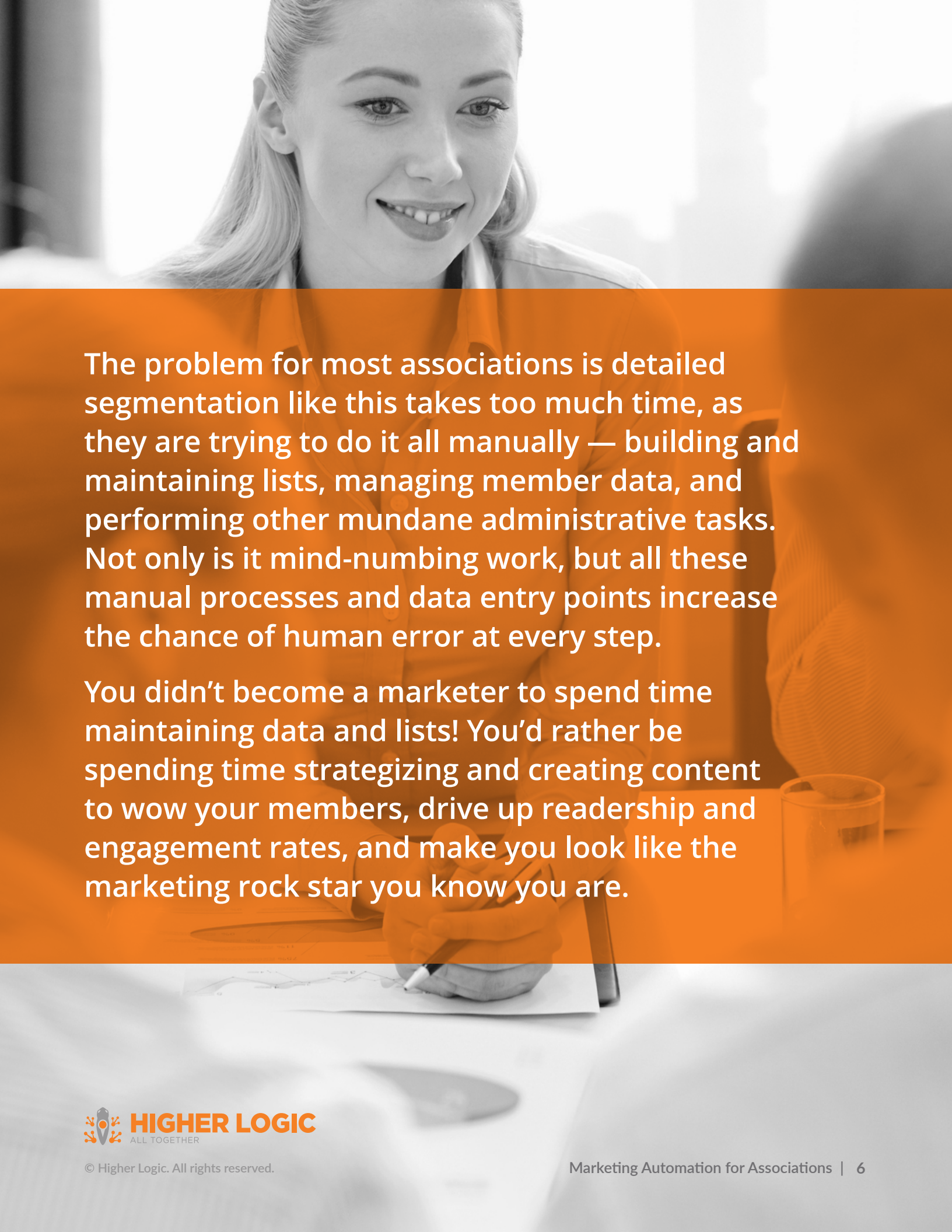
Delivering targeted, customized content starts with segmentation. Some associations are already segmenting, such as by member type. For example, a healthcare association might send different newsletters to students, practitioners, and researchers.

Segmentation is a relatively straightforward task: identify the traits that separate one segment of members from another. These traits must be well-defined and concrete enough to justify a different message or communication strategy. These differences can vary, but will typically be demographic or behavioral based. Once you've created these groups, you can start creating content that will appeal to them.

Let's look at a practical example from the Entomological Society of America. Not only do they segment their member base in the usual ways (member category, region), but they also segment by the classes of insects their members are most focused on, as well as by subdisciplines – such as evolution and biodiversity, plant-insect ecosystems, and medical, urban, and veterinary entomology. This kind of detailed segmentation helps them narrowly target their email outreach for newsletters or for events.

To be more strategic, **create personas and build segmentations around them.**





The problem for most associations is detailed segmentation like this takes too much time, as they are trying to do it all manually — building and maintaining lists, managing member data, and performing other mundane administrative tasks. Not only is it mind-numbing work, but all these manual processes and data entry points increase the chance of human error at every step.

You didn't become a marketer to spend time maintaining data and lists! You'd rather be spending time strategizing and creating content to wow your members, drive up readership and engagement rates, and make you look like the marketing rock star you know you are.

WHERE AUTOMATION COMES IN

Marketing automation takes over the mundane, process-oriented aspects of email communication so you can focus on the fun stuff.

With automation, the work of segmentation is done for you – you pick the audience segment you wish to target and your automation tool creates the list based on your needs. As new members join, they are added to the appropriate segments automatically — no more manual list maintenance!

What's more, marketing automation tools continuously learn as you communicate with your members. If a member completes an action – reads an article, visits a landing page, or registers for a local event — you can set your automation tool to follow up on that action. Member profiles are updated, and this information can be used to further tailor content to individual needs.



Dynamically Change Your Email Content Based on Your Recipients' Segments

Here is the best part. With marketing automation, you can dynamically change the content of emails based on the segment of the recipient. Remember the healthcare association that sends different newsletters to students, practitioners, and researchers? In a regular email system, that's three different emails to create, send, and track. In a marketing automation system, you create a single email, with a few sections of content specific to each audience, then send and track in a single step. When the email is sent, the system inserts the appropriate content for each audience.

Let's return to the Entomological Society of America to talk about how this works in action. Using marketing automation, the ESA sends out an announcement about upcoming webinars to both members and non-members. The bulk of the announcement is the same except for a sidebar. For members, the sidebar provides instructions about how to access archived webinars. For nonmembers, the sidebar provides details on how to join, highlighting access to archived webinars as a benefit. So — what are the practical results of more targeted, engaging content? For the ESA, they saw the open rate of their bi-weekly newsletter jump by nearly 15 percent, as well as increasing membership and attendance at their annual meeting.

Marketing automation has now reached a tipping point — it's completely accessible and no longer restricted to enterprise level organizations with vast resources. With their member data and contact lists, associations are perfectly poised to take advantage of better email content, moving towards a real "one-to-one" experience for their members. Automation leads to significant time savings, greater ROI, and most importantly for associations, higher member engagement. The better targeted your content is, the more likely it is to have an impact with your audience. Your audience will not only engage with your content at a higher rate, their perception of your association's value will skyrocket. At the end of the day, your job is to serve your members. Marketing automation makes it easier to do that job.



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