The Future of Member Organizations
Not data

This is my personal view of the changing role of member organizations in veterinary medicine – what they were, are today and what they may become.

Like Scrooge, we have a chance to see and understand the present - and change our future.

1. My story (recent history)
2. The changing profession
   a. Who we are
   b. What we do
3. The industry of the future
   a. Ownership
   b. Consolidation
   c. Specialization
4. Membership associations
Member

Cornell University

Single
Male
22 years old
No money – no debt

Companion animal practice
Suburban New York City
1. Community

1970s WRVMA
The local association was a real veterinary community that tackled issues of local importance.
There was a well-defined leadership path.

Everyone expected to take their turn leading.
If you were motivated, there was a path for engagement beyond your local community.
2. Transition

After the Boomers
"Turn and face the strange."

David Bowie
We are different people

Generational

Gender

Geography
We do different work
We work in different ways

- full-time
- shift work
- mobile
We work for different people

- Ourselves
- Other veterinarians
- Regular corporations
- Not for Profits
It’s changing fast

Blink and you’ll miss the next stage
3. Consolidate & Splinter

All for one / one for all?
The industry is continuing to evolve into larger and more vertically integrated organizations.
Consolidation is accelerating
While mixed practices still exist in many parts of the country...

...there are fewer mixed animal practitioners
Specialization has continued to grow

AVMA data
Virtual medicine

Telemedicine and other methods of delivering services remotely – from mail order medications to medical advice – is certain to gain traction in the next few years as the technology and society evolve.
Societal changes bring their own pressures

- Decreasing support for education
- Increasing educational debt
- 21st Century parenting
4. The Industry

Working for The Man
More veterinarians will be employees in the future.

These platforms are already large - and all are growing rapidly.
Corporate employers look at benefit packages for veterinary associates as an employment cost – not as affinity support for their profession.

The degree to which membership is valued by associates is the degree to which corporate employers will be willing to pay the dues – as opposed to another benefit.

It’s a zero-sum game.
Who is paying your dues?

How do you approach a transactional membership?
5. Learned societies

1863 USVMA
Building a profession

Learned Societies supported the evolution of professions that were based on scientific inquiry and educational standards.

They helped develop specialized workers into licensed professions, limiting access to practice.

USVMA meeting, 1895, Des Moines, IA
Not Facebook

Learned Societies – today’s veterinary associations – were formed because of common financial interests.
Financial interests

Professional standards ensure expertise but limit public access to services.

Associations give strength and political voice to the professionals
The learned usually find themselves equipped to live in a world that no longer exists.

Eric Hoffer
6.

Tomorrow

Building a new community
Is it time for a mission reboot?

- AVMA is up to 91,000 – but, really?
- CE is everywhere – and often free
- Engaging membership is challenging

- Engagement requires time
- Competition for time and attention is fierce

- Increasingly, association membership is one employment benefit out of a host of others and, **without engagement**, a precarious one
It may be the devil or it may be the Lord
But you're gonna have to serve somebody

Bob Dylan
Whom do you serve?

As we look ahead we need to better define our customer – the people we can rationally expect to pay our dues.

- If we serve “the profession” - does that mean just veterinarians?
- If we serve individual veterinarians - do they pay their own dues?
- Is the relationship different with veterinarian practice owners?
- If we focus on the business of veterinary medicine - do we support employers or employees?
Supporting the profession used to lift all boats – does it still?

**Individual veterinarians**
- Invested in the status quo
- Maintain high standards
- Limit public access to care
- Fight “scope of practice” creep
- Slow adoption of new technologies
- Fight disruptive business models
  - Employees care less about small business issues

**Consumer-facing companies**
- Rapidly adopt new technologies
- Embrace disruptive business models
- Provide new services in new ways
- Control costs - “good enough” quality
- Use non-veterinarians to deliver more services more cheaply
  - Veterinarians are a cost of business
If you get to join just one professional association, which one will you join?

The species you work with?

The cause you care about?

The business you run?
Is just one reason to be a member enough?
New grads

What’s the role of a teaser rate when dues are a corporate benefit?
A la carte?

Can you pay only for what you use?

• Lobbying
• Regulatory activity
• Liability insurance
• Organizational development
• Leadership training
• Continuing education
• Journals
We don't have to save the world. The world is big enough to look after itself.

What we have to be concerned about is whether or not the world we live in will be capable of sustaining us in it.

Douglas Adams
I don’t have the answers

To remain a vital profession, we need to find and hold a center that arises from common purpose.

We need to nurture associations that derive their missions from the needs of their members.

Can associations match the benefits offered by NAVC, WVC or VIN – especially to employers?

Maybe you do.