

## Associations Move to an International Focus

Ever consider opening a branch of your association in Tokyo? How about London? Sound crazy? Think again.

The other day, one of our state associations received a request for membership information from a fellow who currently lives in Australia. This would have been unheard of just a few years ago. Now, as Carolyn A. Lugbill, CAE, writes in her chapter, "Going International," in *Professional Practices in Association Management*, "the various kinds of communication technology available have thrust associations into the global arena whether or not they want to be there." She notes that associations open themselves up to the world once they can be accessed easily and inexpensively on the Internet.

Today it is increasingly rare to find an association that does not have an email address or website presence. Once this is in place, people from virtually everywhere in the world can reach the association. Many associations that never considered having an international focus are now looking anew at the possibilities.

The world market is an open door for your association's products and services. With the Internet, time differences and postal service reliability are not a factor. Your website can be accessed 24-hours a day and fax-on-demand can also eliminate previous stumbling blocks to the international marketplace.

Want to increase your membership? There are many reasons that people in other countries could find it beneficial to be a member of your association. International members can now easily exchange information or expertise with your members via a listserv. They can have access to your newsletter by receiving it via download from your website. They can access information on U.S. jobs through your employment listings. And you can automate your membership sign-up and renewal processes so that they can easily join and update their records.

Want to increase your meeting revenue? You now have the capacity to promote attendance at your conventions and exhibits to a whole new audience. Washington State is great site for a vacation--why not encourage them to plan their vacation around your annual conference? Or, better yet, use Internet technology to make your seminars or home-study continuing education programs available to them on-line.

One trend that began in city government is also moving into the association arena. Many cities now have "sister" cities in other countries. They have found that their citizens can benefit from the exchange of information and cultures. Associations are now beginning to see the possibilities of this type of "sister" exchange and looking for their international counterparts.

This past October, the National Association of Professional Mortgage Women (NAPMW), headed up by MCH's Patty Hull, sponsored a delegation to China. The two-week trip, coordinated by LIYA International in Seattle, Washington, for the China Women's Association for Science & Technology, provided a forum for

professionals from the NAPMW membership and China to exchange information about mortgage lending – a concept that is new to China.

Though more than half a dozen actual workplaces visits, NAPMW members were provided with the opportunity to learn about the "mortgage industry" in China and how their Chinese counterparts work. Information was shared on topics, such as there being no deeds in China as land ownership remains with the government, the Chinese appraisers carry out duties similar to underwriters in the U.S., a mandatory housing fund that is available to all Chinese, and the period of time for a Chinese family to save enough money to buy a home being normally ten years.

In addition to their professional experience, the NAPMW delegation took part in a cultural program that focused on several of China's cultural highlights, including The Great Wall, Tian'anmen Square, the Forbidden City, and others.

In other "global" activities, the Home Care Association of Washington (HCAW) and its new educational foundation, the Alliance for Healthy Communities (AHC), have been making connections with the health care industry in Japan. As that country is implementing new regulations related to elder care, it expects its small home health industry to grow rapidly, and wants to learn from countries where home care is a substantial and recognized segment of the health care continuum.

Representatives of Japan's medical community have visited our state and met with Home Care Association members and staff to learn about our "best practices." In addition, HCAW/AHC Executive Director Donna Cameron, CAE, has been interviewed by a Japanese nursing magazine for a feature on the Home Care Association of Washington and home care practices in Washington State. HCAW hopes to continue to foster this Pacific Rim alliance and to share its experience and expertise with Japan.

Last year, members of the Washington Society of Association Executives (WSAE) hosted the leaders of non-profit, non-governmental organizations from Russia. The idea of trade and professional associations is still a fairly new concept in Russia, but it is beginning to be embraced with enthusiasm. Robin Barry, CAE, MCH staffer and Executive Director of the Washington State Psychological Association (WSPA), hosted a Russian counterpart in the MCH offices for a day, showing her WSPA practices and activities. Other WSAE members, including Tracy White, CAE, and Marcia Holland, CAE, of the Washington State CPA Society, and Executive Director Donna Cameron, CAE, provided training and instruction in such areas as strategic planning, meetings management, alliance building, and association governance.

As we extend our reach and enlarge our visions, the association community is learning that it is, indeed, a small, small, world!