

Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers

The following interview was conducted with SMPTE's Membership Vice President six months after XYZ University completed a Membership Growth Strategy for the organization.

What was the main challenge that motivated you to seek help?

Our membership was stagnating. We had the problem that many societies have, and that is getting new blood in – getting new people into leadership and getting younger members. And we had been talking about this problem for years -- since back in 2003! We really needed help in redesigning everything.

Why did you choose to work with Sarah Sladek and the team at XYZ University?

What's different about you from everybody else is that you actually have next steps! It wasn't just a matter of handing over data. With you, we just got more. And we really enjoyed working with Sarah and found her point of view and her frankness refreshing. She tells it like it is.

What results did you see immediately after hiring us?

Lots of change is happening! Our outreach is beginning to pay off. We have more diversity in who is participating and joining. And there's more honesty in how people communicate now. Before, our members and volunteers wouldn't speak up and share, and now they are. Also, we're bringing in directors from different parts of the world and introducing a new back-end system to process payments through international credit cards. This is important as an international society, and the request came through loud and clear on the research XYZ University did for SMPTE. Also, we used to charge for a lot of our information -- even members, although we charged them a lesser price. But now we're shifting our approach. We're providing more membership value. And there's a new budget being approved which is big. Working with XYZ University has been very, very good for us!

What did you like the most about working with us?

One, the roadmap. I mean, that is incredibly helpful. You didn't just hand over data and wish us luck. Two, the stakeholder retreat, or what we like to call the rah-rah session. And three, the strategy reveal to the board. What Sarah revealed to our board was honest and didn't throw punches. It went so much better than if it was the staff presenting this information the board! Those three things alone make XYZ University's approach really different and just better. Also, we appreciated Sarah's way of communicating. It's no nonsense but warm at the same time and honest and enthusiastic and supportive. That really helped. She has been there and done that, and she knows how to speak to people to get the best out of them. That's an art.

Was there anything that we could improve to make it better for future customers like you?

I think you should insist that everybody read Sarah's book, *The End of Membership As We Know It*, before they engage with you. It will give clients a foundation. It would have been very helpful if our board had read it.

Would you recommend our work to other organizations like yours? If so, why?

Yes! Because you're different. You offer a process that helps an organization through the process of change. You don't just share a report -- you tell people what to do with the data and guide them through the change-making process. That's been huge for us.

Anything else you'd like to add?

Sarah is great to work with. She often asks us 'Are you having fun?' I really took that to heart, and frankly, so did our whole team. We realized we aren't doing enough of that. I think we all could benefit from putting a little more fun into our jobs. And Sarah made that clear. Also, Sarah's book, *MemberShift*, should be required reading for everybody in a nonprofit. I read it and thought, 'Where've you been all my life?'. It's a great book.