

III. PROMOTING A SECTION MEETING

A. Promotion and Marketing

The success or failure of a meeting is due, in large part, to the quality of planning. After a meeting is organized, however, promotion becomes a key factor in the meeting's outcome. Promotion is the aspect of marketing that deals with achieving meeting objectives, such as generating program awareness within the market or reaching certain attendance goals.

Strategies for promoting Section meetings to potential attendees include direct mail brochures, flyers, letters sent via mail or fax, articles and advertisements in newsletters, and information posted on the Internet.

As soon as you know details about your meeting, pass this information on to the AOAC Manager, Section Programs so the information can be included in the AOAC monthly magazine *Inside Laboratory Management* and added to the AOAC web site. Please provide contact information along with the meeting details. You may want to send the basic information to begin publicizing your Section meeting and then forward additional information, as it becomes available. Of course, you will also want to add this information to your own Section web site.

B. Printed Promotional Materials

1) BROCHURE:

The number of brochures you should produce to promote your Section meeting will be determined by the size of your mailing list, the number of contacts provided from AOAC, how many attendees you are trying to attract and the size of your budget. A typical response rate would be approximately 5%. A 2,000 piece mailing should result in about 100 attendees. These response rates will vary due to the types of contacts of the mailing list, the quality of the program and other promotion factors.

Cost factors to consider when producing a brochure include design, typesetting, paper and ink used in printing, mailing preparation (inserting materials in envelopes, labeling, sorting, etc.), and postage. Photocopying is a cost saving alternative option to printing if high quality photocopying is available and if the piece is designed to be reproduced on paper that is compatible to photocopying equipment.

It is recommended that Sections send two mailings to promote the meeting. The first should be mailed six to eight months prior to the meeting and the second mailed three to four months before. Your first mailing may also include a "Call for Papers", if appropriate for your Section, to save the cost of sending separately. Self-mailing (label and postage are affixed directly to the piece) brochures are popular and economical since you save the cost of envelopes and reduce the weight of mailing.

When producing a direct mail piece to promote your Section meeting, you need to consider the design, cover, content and timing of the mailing.

The brochure should be **designed** specifically to generate attendance at your Section meeting. Copy or text should be clear, concise, specific and written in the active voice with short sentences. Be sure to include benefits of attending and instructions for the potential attendee (register today, call or send an e-mail now for more details, etc.). Depending on your resources, you may choose to have one of your talented volunteers design and layout the piece on word processing or desktop publishing equipment, or send it out to a graphic designer. Most graphic designers do typesetting as well as design; however, if you provide the copy or text on a disk that is compatible with your designer/typesetter's equipment, you'll save the cost of having the copy entered.

The **cover** of your brochure is the first part of the piece the audience will see, so its appearance and message are very important. It should include information such as:

- ◆ **Title** – to capture attention and convey the purpose of the meeting
- ◆ **Specifics** – dates and location
- ◆ **Audience** – whom the program is designed to serve
- ◆ **Summary** – a brief description of the program
- ◆ **Sponsorship** – program being offered by “Name of your Section” of AOAC INTERNATIONAL
- ◆ **Logo** – AOAC logo and/or Section logo

Content of the brochure should provide complete information, including details that will encourage attendance. The copy must convince readers of the value of the meeting and elicit a response. Use headlines and motivating teaser copy to capture attention and highlight key information.

Include the following details of your Section meeting:

- ◆ Title of the program.
- ◆ Date, time and location.
- ◆ Sponsor.
- ◆ Objectives.
- ◆ Who should attend and why?
- ◆ Speaker's names (as well as their titles and affiliations).
- ◆ Program schedule.
- ◆ Fees and what is included in for the fee – **include a different fee for AOAC members and non-members, as mentioned in the “Registration Procedures” section of the Meeting and Marketing Guide.** This is a **required** policy for all AOAC products and services. Sections may choose to have a pricing structure that allows for different rates for Section-only members, but it is not required by AOAC policy. All promotional materials for Section meetings **must** include a lower rate for AOAC members.
- ◆ Special events and functions.
- ◆ Lodging information – include a cutoff date for housing registration in addition to the address, telephone, rates and other lodging details.
- ◆ Facility information.

- ◆ Cancellation policy.
- ◆ Registration procedures and deadlines.
- ◆ Registration form and/or another reply vehicle – to capture names of interested parties.
- ◆ Contact information – “who” potential attendees should contact and “how” to contact them to obtain additional information.

A sample brochure is located in Appendix B. If you would like to receive an electronic copy of this brochure sample, please contact the AOAC Membership Coordinator, Section Programs.

2) PRESS RELEASE:

To maximize the publicity for your Section meeting, you may want to consider drafting a press release to submit to appropriate publications, including journals, magazines, associations, newsletters and local newspapers. Any resulting articles will be seen by potential attendees and can increase the impact of your promotional message. Many trade and professional publications offer complimentary calendar listings of appropriate meetings.

Once the Section meeting date, location and program are set, you should prepare and mail a press release to your press list. If your meeting moves to different locations each year, you will want to supplement your press list with publications local to the meeting site. The more detail included in the press release the more likely it will attract the attention of potential attendees. A well-known speaker or hot new topic will generate the most interest.

A press release needs to be prepared and sent at least four or five months prior to the meeting date due, to the four-to-ten week lead time for most publications.

Press releases should:

- ◆ Be double spaced and dated;
- ◆ Provide the basic facts (who, when, where, and why), program highlights and special features of the meeting; and
- ◆ Include contact information such as “who” potential attendees should contact and “how” to contact them to obtain additional information.

C. Mailing Lists

Each AOAC Section is responsible for developing and maintaining their own Section mailing list. Contacts in the list may include past meeting attendees, Section members (if applicable), AOAC Manager of Section Programs and potential meeting prospects. The prospects include government, industry, and academic scientists.

A list of current, past and prospective AOAC INTERNATIONAL members is available upon request for Section use from AOAC Headquarters. Contact the AOAC Manager, Section Programs if you are interested in receiving a list to add to your current mailing list or

to use separately to promote your meeting. These lists are available in both printed and electronic formats. Labels may be available; depending on the number of contact names being requested. Please let us know your preference and we will be happy to accommodate your needs.

Members of the Executive Committee and others involved in the meeting promotion should be continually identifying sources of prospective meeting attendees. Sources might include national, state, provincial, county, and city government laboratories; manufacturers and processors in the food, pharmaceuticals, drugs, cosmetics, agricultural chemicals, and other fields relevant to AOAC, and who have laboratories; University professors and University laboratories; contract laboratories; laboratory equipment and supplies manufacturers; and other scientific associations.

The Section mailing list should be kept current. Executive Committee members should inspect the list periodically to cull outdated names. You may wish to send a postpaid return card to list contacts to verify if they want to continue to receive information regarding Section activities or develop a policy for deleting names of people who have not responded after a specific number of years.

Postal Considerations – Your Section budget and resources will determine the method of mailing. Mailing houses are equipped to handle large mailings in a timely manner and, if affordable, may be the option for your Section. Before mailing, inquire about postal regulations that may affect the piece. There are certain restrictions as to what can be sent third-class under a bulk rate number. First-class postage is preferred when the timing is tight, as delivery time is usually 3-5 days.

It is especially important to mail all materials on time. Each day after the optimum brochure mailing date can cost a percentage of the total registrations. For example, if it were only 2 percent, a two-week late mailing could result in more than 25 percent fewer attendees.

D. Web site

On-line communications are the fastest growing medium for promoting all types of products and services. Advertising your Section activities on both the AOAC web site and your individual Section web site should be included in your meeting marketing strategy.

E. Telephone Contacts

Another popular marketing strategy to encourage Section meeting attendance is making personal telephone contacts to qualified candidates. As the meeting date approaches, you may be able to increase the number of attendees by providing one-on-one explanations of the features of your meeting. This strategy can often convince Lab Directors and others who make these decisions that they (or other members of their staff) should attend.

When implementing this strategy remember to:

- 1) Create a list of your best prospects.
- 2) Divide the list among those who've agreed to make the calls.
- 3) Provide each caller with complete meeting information.
- 4) Send the program and registration form to interested parties.

F. Conclusion

A successful marketing plan is the key to building attendance at your Section meeting. To make the meeting as successful as possible, you must reach the appropriate audience and motivate them to attend. To accomplish this, the proper market must be identified and the right media must be used to reach them. Your promotional resources should focus on the different strategies highlighted in this Meeting and Marketing Guide. These include: direct mail (brochures, flyers, and letters) sent via mail or fax, articles and advertisements in newsletters, information posted on the AOAC web site, as well as your individual Section web site, and personal telephone contacts. After your Section meeting, you should review registration statistics. Correlate major receipt dates of responses to the dates promotional pieces were sent. Evaluating the current year will benefit planning for the next Section meeting.