



# Rethinking Your Association Audience

*“You have to let people into the organization first so they can see the value of being part of it.”*

One of the most popular memberships in the world is likely one you’re already part of: Amazon Prime. The Jeff Bezos behemoth wormed its way into our lives — and pocketbooks — by first solving what was then one of the biggest problems with online shopping: slow, expensive shipping costs.

Thanks to the one-time-fee that gets you Amazon Prime access, a shopper is able to lock in “free” two-day (or faster) shipping for most of their purchases for an entire year. And while it was a brilliant strategy to all but guarantee repeat customers for an extended amount of time, the true stroke of genius came not in offering Prime membership. Instead, it was in offering the ability to shop on Amazon even if you weren’t a Prime member.

Why does that matter? By avoiding the construction of those walls, Amazon gave itself an even larger potential customer base.

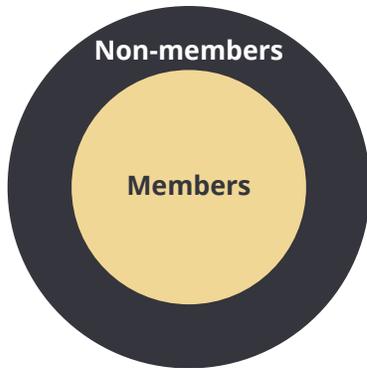
In the past several years, Amazon has been adding additional products to its Prime membership, investing in streaming services, offering photo storage and even discounts to Whole Foods shoppers after the company came under Amazon’s control. All of it’s made a Prime membership a financial no-brainer for even the casual customer of Amazon’s services — but every single one of these assets can be purchased or enjoyed piecemeal without even having the Prime membership.

For those who haven’t yet taken the plunge on the annual membership fee, Amazon has carefully constructed these multifaceted ways to interact with the company before they do. In effect, they’ve made the top of their customer journey funnel as wide as possible.

Compare this to a traditional association. Most present their pricing structure to the public in terms of member versus non-member value. Structuring your business around the idea of getting people to become members first is not as effective today as it has been in the past because today’s consumers want a casual relationship first. You have to let people into the organization first so they can see the value of being part of it. Sure, this means that some people will never become members. But by increasing your audience size, you increase your potential revenue and impact on achieving your Core Purpose.

**“ Why does that matter? By avoiding the construction of those walls, Amazon gave itself an even larger potential customer base. ”**

## Move to...



## An Open Garden Model



Let's break down this new approach to considering your membership.

**The traditional model:** In the chart at left, you see an example of a binary approach to membership. With apologies to Heidi Klum, you're either in or you're out. Members have access to the value — that's the content, networking, educational opportunities and advocacy — that an association can provide. You either pony up the cash, time or other resources needed to prove your interest in the association and its work, or you don't. Either way, a person is just one of two things: In the membership, or not.

**The Open Garden model:** In the chart at right, you see an example of this new way of thinking. Starting from the very center of the chart, it offers a way to consider your audience as:

- **Volunteers:** This goes beyond just membership. These are the people who are on your board or return year after year to volunteer at your conference. They are dedicated, and they'll see your organization through transition and turmoil because they believe so strongly in what it can accomplish.
- **Members:** Take a step back, and you hit your general population of members. These are the people who pay the dues, perhaps attend events and regularly or occasionally interact with the content you create.
- **Interested people:** Take another step back, and you find the people who are interested in the work your organization is doing but are not likely to become members. If your association caters to broadcast journalists, for example, the interested people might include journalism professors, newspaper reporters or magazine photographers. Much of the content intended for your core membership may interest or offer value to these other people, but they're not likely to make the leap to paying dues, let alone serving on your board or volunteering.
- **General public:** Also not likely to become members, they may still have interest in the content your organization offers or a political stance you may take, depending on the news of the day and helpfulness of the content you generate.

**Why this matters:** Taking an Open Garden approach is not simply about boosting your revenue as though you're offering Amazon Prime (even if some associations are getting into the business of streaming content). Instead, this ties directly back to your Core Purpose and how well you're working toward fulfilling it.

The people at the center are most likely to be familiar with an organization's Core Purpose. This is both a challenge and an opportunity: If associations can do a better job of expressing their Core Purpose, living it and communicating it consistently, decision-making is more likely to fall in line with that purpose.

Growth, in the end, is tied to Core Purpose. It lays the groundwork for how you communicate with the people inside and outside your organization, setting the stage for how you engage with them.

**Your turn:** Fill in the following charts with details about your association audience, considering carefully what type of message might resonate most with each audience.

## Audience Type: Volunteers

What are some examples of people who would fit into this group?

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Grade your organization's current engagement with this group (circle one):

A   B   C   D   F

Why do you believe you've earned this grade?

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What content do you already develop that might appeal to this group?

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What media platforms and content types might be best to engage with them?

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What content do you not yet develop that might appeal to this group?

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# Audience Type: Members

What are some examples of people who would fit into this group?

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Grade your organization's current engagement with this group (circle one):

A   B   C   D   F

Why do you believe you've earned this grade?

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What content do you already develop that might appeal to this group?

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What media platforms and content types might be best to engage with them?

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What content do you not yet develop that might appeal to this group?

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# Audience Type: Interested People

What are some examples of people who would fit into this group?

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Grade your organization's current engagement with this group (circle one):

A   B   C   D   F

Why do you believe you've earned this grade?

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What content do you already develop that might appeal to this group?

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What media platforms and content types might be best to engage with them?

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What content do you not yet develop that might appeal to this group?

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# Audience Type: General Public

What are some examples of people who would fit into this group?

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Grade your organization's current engagement with this group (circle one):

A   B   C   D   F

Why do you believe you've earned this grade?

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What content do you already develop that might appeal to this group?

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What media platforms and content types might be best to engage with them?

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What content do you not yet develop that might appeal to this group?

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Contact us to learn more!

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