

BOARD DOCUMENT



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TO: Board of Directors
FROM: Janice Lachance, CEO
DATE: 11 October 2006
RE: Alliances and Partners Assessment

Background

SLA has traditionally viewed the term “partnership” as a description for its relationships with suppliers in the information industry that invest in SLA programs, services, and events as sponsors. From publications to conferences, SLA has typically sought financial support from our industry partners in order to offset costs for those activities.

In recent years, this practice has continued with a fairly high level of success. Simultaneously, however, SLA has sought to partner with companies and associations in order to deliver new value to members and to the SLA brand. Examples include:

- An experimental joint marketing partnership with Outsell, Incorporated, to match their analytic expertise with our info pro community.
- Relationships with Factiva and Nexcerpt to deliver news content to members as an added value of membership.
- An alliance with Information Today that more closely links SLA to ITI events and publications.
- A budding relationship with the Software and Information Industry Association to explore common goals and interests for advancing the global information community.
- A developing relationship with Newsgator to create an SLA-branded RSS feed reader for the membership, and integration of RSS newsfeeds to the SLA Web site.

In 2006, an SLA task force assessed the Association’s priorities and goals for alliances and partnerships generated by SLA in the future. The results of that assessment may be reviewed at <https://www.sla.org/PDFs/boarddocs/2006/A06-42.pdf>. The SLA Board of Directors received the task force’s report at its June 2006 meeting, and directed staff to investigate the recommendations in that report during the remainder of 2006.

This document seeks to serve as a springboard for shaping a futuristic approach to partnerships for SLA. It will assess partnership strategy from two angles: a) from the traditional perspective of direct financial and in-kind support from the information industry; and b) from the perspective of partner targets as experts in areas where SLA cannot or should not invest in technology, personnel or consulting resources to deliver value for the SLA community or to economize SLA operations.

This document will focus primarily on the nature and scope of partnership for SLA, but will touch on some important aspects of membership as it relates to partnership strategy.

Priorities for SLA Partnership Development

The Vision of SLA Partnerships: SLA is the premiere association for partnerships with and among the stakeholders in the global data, content, information, and knowledge community.

The Mission of SLA Partnership Development: SLA aims to partner with enterprises in the business/nonprofit, government, and academic sectors of the global economy in order to meet common goals, extend SLA and partner brands, provide value to the SLA membership, and yield support for SLA products, services, events, and other initiatives.

Key Strategic Areas of Focus for SLA Partnership Development: Learning, networking, and advocacy for information professionals and their strategic partners.

Core Values of for SLA Partnership Development: 1) Broad financial support from suppliers to the profession for the SLA experience through sponsorship, exhibitions, advertising; 2) A commitment from stakeholders in the global information community to share expertise with the profession through SLA publishing and educational vehicles; 3) Investment in the enhancement of the SLA experience through the sharing of content and technologies that are of value to information professionals; and 4) expansion of the SLA membership base through outreach to stakeholder customers, clients, and users.

Core Value 1: Financial Support from Suppliers to the Profession

This is a very familiar area of focus for SLA, as our strategic partners in the information industry have been committed to this kind of support for a long time. By advertising in SLA's *Information Outlook* and on the SLA Web site, purchasing exhibition space at an SLA conference, or investing in sponsorship of an SLA product, service, event or initiative, our partners show their support for the profession while yielding enhanced brand visibility, increased lead generation for new business growth, and high levels of recognition and prestige within the global information community.

In recent years, increasing pressures on sales and marketing budgets have forced our partners in the information industry to carefully examine their investments in all aspects of marketing, including efforts through SLA and sister associations around the world. These pressures have altered the general business philosophy on marketing investments, in that all activities are now expected to yield new business growth or, at the very least, incremental growth in existing business.

SLA has witnessed and experienced several trends in this decade:

- a growing need for more effective services and higher visibility for its events and programs;
- a decline in print advertising sales to the information industry;
- expansion of the Info-Expo as the leading information and knowledge management event in North America;
- higher expectations from our industry partners in terms of the quantity and quality of services related to sponsorship, including increased levels of return on investment
- growing opportunities for in-kind contributions to SLA through sharing of expertise, technology, research, consulting, products and services with members through the Association.

After more than 10 years of providing integrated services for the information industry and witnessing a greater level of focus on the quality of these services, we can clearly see that SLA serves not only the information profession; we serve the information industry, too. SLA is now a marketing services organization for the companies that serve the profession. Our growth directly

reflects the trends in the information industry AND the trends experienced by the information profession. Thus, our future directly reflects their collective futures.

Moving forward, SLA needs to adopt a multi-tiered approach on the mix of services we provide to our stakeholders:

- Advertising: there are three areas for growth here:
 - tapping into the existing base of the information industry in order to generate greater preference for SLA advertising vehicles. For example, exhibitors in the Info-Expo will be offered advertising “riders” during the exhibit buying process in order to generate more year-round visibility.
 - identify key stakeholder groups outside the information industry but within the realm of the global library and information community that are ripe for advertising.
 - identify segments of the business community outside the information industry (technology, consulting, service providers) that might see an opportunity for reaching out to our community.
- Exhibition: retention of previous and existing exhibitors continues in a very effective manner. SLA’s greatest challenge lies in reaching out to the newer segments of the information industry (search technology companies, for example) and in connecting with companies that have indirect links to the profession (business consulting, technology companies, etc.).
- Sponsorship: this is where the greatest need for change must occur, so that our industry partners yield the benefits they deserve and SLA generates the levels of support it needs in order to generate effective services and higher visibility for events and programs. To date, sponsorships have been priced according to an inconsistent strategy:
 - In some cases, pricing has been set based on the need to cover the costs associated with the activity, often including the benefits of the sponsorship.
 - In some cases, pricing has been set to balance out SLA budgetary investment, fees to participants in the sponsored event or project, or both.
 - In some cases where the costs for an event or project are significant, pricing has been set based on the demand for a sponsorship (translation: the sponsorship likely does not cover the costs for the event or project).

Moving forward, flexibility in the pricing strategy for SLA sponsorships should be appropriate for high-end opportunities (USD 20,000 and above). Anything less should be set at fixed levels that offset costs, including overhead expenses.

SLA’s future strategy as a marketing services organization must focus on delivering an integrated set of products and services to the information industry and other strategic partners while developing additional, innovative opportunities for generating brand awareness, product visibility, and lead generation. This should include:

- Packaging of marketing services together to create a diverse mix of exposure and lead generation opportunities for the customer, with some savings offered as incentive to purchase.
- Developing new SLA member features that are attractive for sponsorship, including non-traditional services that are attractive to members as business professionals or as consumers.
- Creating a more structured and transparent pricing strategy for sponsorships so that customers know what they are getting for their investment and SLA is able to fully cover costs.
- Expand our marketing services customer base to include Web 2.0 companies and leading edge technology, services, and consulting markets.

Core Value 2: Sharing Knowledge from Stakeholders with the Profession

Learning is one of the fundamental components of the SLA Strategy. We exist to share knowledge across the community so that information professionals around the world can advance their careers. Much of the valuable knowledge in our community exists in the minds of the people working for the companies in the information industry; for government organizations that relate to the profession; and for academic/non-profit organizations that represent or educate the profession. These organizations know our members and their needs. Who better to understand the capabilities, trends, tools, strategies and tactics required for success?

SLA currently deploys several vehicles for leveraging knowledge across our stakeholders:

- Annual Conference: Through speaking and training opportunities, stakeholder representatives are sharing knowledge with our members.
- Chapter and Division Events: Almost all chapters and many divisions conduct programming for their members, and they rely on many colleagues in the information industry and academia to serve as speakers, moderators, panelists, and trainers.
- Click University: Key stakeholders are beginning to leverage the online component of Click U., and our Click U. Live! service is an attraction for a growing number of stakeholder organizations to share knowledge.
- *Information Outlook*: As authors or columnists, stakeholders have equal footing with member-information professionals to be published and share knowledge in print/electronic form.

Staff sees this as an area that has proven successful for SLA and our stakeholders, and has driven valuable knowledge to the profession. Moving forward, we believe this practice requires greater consistency, better coordination, and deeper penetration into our stakeholder communities and into SLA features and services. Following are suggestions for doing so:

- All exhibiting companies at SLA Annual Conferences could be invited to propose a session in the conference schedule to provide a speaker, presenter, moderator, or panelist as part of their exhibition space purchase. Even if only a percentage takes advantage, it expands our pool of experts from which divisions and SLA staff may select content leaders.
- Recruitment of pre-conference workshop courses (or CE courses) driven by stakeholders should be intensified, focusing not only on companies in the information industry but also on government, non-profit, and academic organizations that do not participate in the Info-Expo.
- Staff can focus more on recruitment of courses and course facilitators for Click University/Click U Live! and for SLA chapters and divisions.
- Existing base of seminars offered by SLA chapters and divisions should be tapped for broader distribution across the SLA community.
- Industry partners should be given the opportunity to design and implement product demonstrations for Click University, so that members can learn about the tools they need to succeed.
- Create a special "Connected Community" department within *Information Outlook* where news, commentary, analysis, and reporting by/from stakeholders can be housed monthly.

Core Value 3: Sharing Content/Technologies to Enhance SLA and the Profession's Value

SLA aims to deliver added value for membership by enhancing the information and services available to members through partnership with content and technology providers. In the recent past, this philosophy has shown early signs of success, with Access Innovations, Information Today, Inc., Factiva, Newsgator, Nexcerpt, and Outsell offering content or content delivery services at no cost to SLA. In all of these cases, selected content is shared or delivered with/to SLA members via the SLA Web site's "Members Only" section. In some cases, members are offered special savings on purchases of services from these suppliers.

Moving forward, SLA has an opportunity to expand this practice and yield a variety of results:

- Simply offering a discount on industry products and services would go a long way towards enhancing the value of membership.
- Staff should ask industry partners for a “slice” of their content or a sample of their services, so that members can generate some value from trial usage and catch a glimpse of what they can gain from a purchase.
- In cases where an industry partner’s technologies, content, or services can enhance the operations of the Association (e.g., our use of Access Innovations technology in the SLA Web site), staff should seek arrangements to do so while providing exposure opportunities for the providers.
- In cases where it is feasible, staff should seek to drive information on discounts and services to SLA unit Web sites, as many prospects are likely visiting them more than the SLA Web site.
- Staff should seek partnership with like-minded organizations in order to generate new programming or to enhance existing programming that will benefit the membership.
- Staff should also seek partnership with associations and companies outside the traditional stakeholder communities in order to broaden the positive impact on targeted groups within the SLA community.

Core Value 4: Expanding the Membership Base through Partner Outreach

Many SLA members work for companies, associations, government agencies, and academic institutions that also serve as our industry partners. These members often have very strong ties to SLA, and they often take on leadership roles. They also diversify the SLA membership’s voice and perspective, giving the Association a balanced brand within the global information community.

One of SLA’s top priorities in the next 3 years is recruitment of new members and retention of existing members in order to grow the global network that is so highly valued by the profession. In the context of partnership development, SLA has many opportunities to leverage these relationships in order to yield success on this front:

- Staff can seek out practicing information professionals around the globe, and will also recruit information industry employees in sales, marketing, consulting, product development and executive roles. Further, recruitment of educators, public officials, and leaders in related professions should be a high priority.
- Currently, SLA deploys educators working in library and information science programs to recruit students for participation in SLA student groups. This is an excellent model for further recruitment in companies, government agencies, associations and academic institutions. Leading SLA members working in these types of organizations should be trained, given the tools, and asked to recruit on behalf of SLA.
- Sales and marketing employees in the information industry have direct contact with librarians and information professionals around the world. Many of them do a great job of generating awareness of SLA among prospective members and even recruiting them for chapter/division events or even membership. SLA should work with the more active members involved in these capacities to determine if there is an appropriate incentive model for strengthening this unofficial recruitment process and standardizing it across the profession.

Summary

A multitude of opportunities exist for SLA to innovate its partnership strategy beyond the current structure of financial commitments. To be sure, the existing marketing services programs must evolve to meet the needs of our industry partners and the Association. Tapping the knowledge and expertise in our stakeholder communities can deepen the value of SLA learning services. Developing alliances and service exchanges in order to drive greater value for SLA membership should continue and expand. Growing the membership should mean recruitment across the

spectrum of stakeholders and via multiple contact points in our community, and not simply through word of mouth among practitioners.

Some of these changes are being implemented immediately, and are reflected in the CEO's 2007 Goals and Objectives; others will require time and an investment of personnel and other resources. Implemented together, they can help SLA achieve success on many fronts.