

An association and its ‘elevator pitch’

I attended for the first time the Illinois, Chicago-based Professional Convention Management Association’s (PCMA) annual conference, called “Convening Leaders 2017”, in Austin, Texas. One of the many educational tracks I joined in was entitled “5 Secrets to a Killer Elevator Pitch”, conducted by Josh Baer, founder and executive director of the Capital Factory, which he describes as the “center of gravity for entrepreneurs in Austin”.

Investopedia defines “elevator pitch” as a term used to describe a brief speech that outlines an idea for a product, service or project. The name comes from the notion that the speech should be delivered in the short-time period of an elevator ride, usually only 20 to 60 seconds.

While generally used as a sales introduction for a product or service, I believe that an elevator pitch can also apply as a succinct introduction of an association. If you can define or describe your association in a brief and clear way, this will not only help your organization focus on its work and advocacy, it will also make members know you better and appreciate your cause more. As such, you may be able to recruit, retain and engage with your members more effectively.

What I suggest as an association elevator pitch is to start by saying that it is a registered and accredited membership and not-for-profit organization (to build credibility). Next is to specify its purpose (reason for being), how it achieves its purpose (mission) and what it aspires to become (vision). By presenting your association in this manner, your audience will recognize the full worth of your association.

As CEO and founder of the Philippine Council of Associations and Association Executives (PCAA), I must admit that I struggled in the beginning to describe what PCAA is all about, although I knew exactly at the onset its purpose of being. Over its young age of three years and, together with its board, supporters and members, we have come out with the following elevator pitch for PCAA. I have to hasten to add, though, that this elevator pitch is still very much a work in progress:

“The Philippine Council of Associations and Association Executives is an SEC [Securities and Exchange Commission]-registered ‘association of associations’ in the country whose purpose is to advance the association management profession and to make associations well-governed and sustainable. It achieves this purpose by professionalizing, through education and certification standards, association governance and association management. It envisions to have a Philippines where associations have good governance practices and effective management systems using a ‘role-delineated, volunteer-governed [board] and staff-run [CEO-led]’ model similar to the governance structures of business companies.”

In essence, an elevator pitch of an association is also its ID, its bumper sticker, or its boilerplate. Having one prepared and applied for use simplifies and clarifies what your association is all about. So next time you are on an elevator, are you ready to pitch your association?