

AAM Triples Online Transactions and Strengthens Customer Service with ISGweb



The American Association of Museums (AAM) has been dedicated to promoting excellence within the museum community since 1906, helping to develop standards and best practices, gathering and sharing knowledge, and providing advocacy on museum issues. AAM currently represents more than 16,000 members. Every type of museum is represented, including art, history, science, military and maritime, and youth museums, as well as aquariums, zoos, botanical gardens, arboretums, historic sites, and science and technology centers.

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Organization: American Association of Museums (AAM)

Challenge: AAM wanted members to be able to update their contact information, register for meetings, apply for membership, pay dues, and purchase products online – 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The association also wanted to ease some of their staff’s internal workload so that they could focus more on customer service. They needed something that would support everything from e-commerce to collaboration without the cost and hassle of custom programming.

Solutions: After extensive research, AAM chose ISGweb for iMIS, a suite of data-driven web modules that provides them with an intuitive solution for their members’ interactive online activities. Members can easily apply for membership, register for events, update their contact information, and participate in collaborative activities on AAM’s website, www.aam-us.org.

Value: The website works the way that AAM’s members and staff want it to work – consistently and automatically. As members enjoy everything from real-time transactions to webinars, AAM has seen a significant return on their technology investment. ISGweb proves a win-win for everyone; members benefit from a website that lets them do what they want to and is easy to use, while AAM staff members can spend more time on customer service matters and less on data entry.

In order to bring all of these museums together, AAM focuses a great deal on customer service. “We are always looking at what we need to do differently to grow and change and fulfill the needs of our members,” says Kevin Conley, Director of Information Technology and Internet Services for AAM.

“One aspect to providing good customer service is allowing people to do things themselves,” continues Conley. “This is the expectation now, since more and more people are buying books through Amazon or making travel reservations online. They expect to be able to do things themselves and get immediate confirmation to know that the process is complete.”

“We are always trying to give our membership as much access as possible to the information we maintain on them, to give individuals the chance to update and maintain the information themselves,” explains Conley.



“Another aspect is that offering self-service allows us to ease some of our internal workload and use staff work time to focus more on membership issues,” adds Conley. “If we’ve got membership staff spending less time re-entering member forms, they can deal with any member issues that may arise.”

With these goals in mind, AAM chose ISGweb for iMIS, a suite of data-driven web modules that offers real-time integration between an association’s website and iMIS. The technology provides AAM with an intuitive solution for members’ interactive online activities. “When we first heard about ISGweb, the timing was perfect,” says Conley. “If ISGweb hadn’t come along, we would have had to do a custom application.”

According to Conley, AAM uses ISGweb extensively. Using the ISGweb Core Modules, members can update their own information in AAM’s database, which greatly increases the accuracy of this information, as costly rekeying errors are eliminated.

The association’s membership process is online; people can join or renew their membership and gain immediate access to member benefits, even though AAM’s dues calculations are complex. In fact, AAM was not able to use the standard iMIS billing process to calculate dues, because they are contingent on ever-changing salaries and budgets. ISG was able to configure the ISGweb Membership Application module to handle both new members and renewals according to AAM’s business rules. A demographic field asks the member’s salary or the organization’s budget, and then calculates the correct amount for dues. Payment is processed in real time, allowing the new or renewing member to gain instant access to members-only pricing and other benefits.



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Registration for all of AAM’s events is available online as well. Initially, AAM only allowed members to register for the annual conference online. That was so successful, the association expanded online event registrations to include professional development seminars and webinars. More than 50% of annual conference registrations and 95% of professional development registrations now occur online, according to Conley.

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Conley. “Transactions have more than tripled, growing from 1800 in 2006 to 5596 in 2008. If all of those transactions were mailed to us and a staff member had to key them in, it would have taken six months. That’s half a staff person’s time that we can use on something else instead of data entry.”

The association recently launched a webinar series with community forums where attendees and speakers can connect before events to share information such as why each person is attending and what they hope to achieve. This information sharing has greatly enhanced the events; speakers get a better idea of who their potential attendees are and can focus their presentation on audience expectations.

“The webinar series has allowed us to greatly expand our reach to our members and to our constituents,” Conley says. “Two years ago when we were just doing professional seminars, our total attendance was around 360. Last year, our webinar attendance jumped to 3000. With the help of ISGweb, we increased our participation by 1000 percent.”

In the past, only a few of AAM’s 13 committees maintained a real membership directory, and most

of them only updated it every couple of years because so much work was involved. "With ISGweb, the committee membership and board rosters are easier to maintain and change since the updating is done automatically," says Conley.

"With the help of ISGweb, we are able to give everybody who is on the committee access to contact information for other members quickly and easily. It's a way to stay closer in touch with less effort," adds Kathy Maxwell, Data Systems Manager at AAM.

AAM's online bookstore is integrated with iMIS, which eases data entry processes considerably. As details change and the association receives new information, it is easy to post and update information on the website faster. In the past, AAM relied primarily on a printed catalog.

"In the past new products were not available for purchase until the catalog went out," explains Conley. "But now, as soon as a new book goes into inventory and the iMIS system, it's immediately available online."

About 50 percent of the books in the printed catalog show an image of the book cover. But online, 97 percent of them have the image. "It's more visually inviting, as you can see what the book looks like," states Conley.

"One of the things that all associations deal with is doing the most for members for the least amount of money," says Maxwell. "We're always looking to



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improve services to members at a cost we can manage. Providing the online services gives members instant gratification and lets us respond better to member needs because we're not spending all of our time trying to get their payments processed."

"We had some of these processes on the site before," states Conley. "But behind the scenes we had hundreds of forms floating around the office with information that had to be rekeyed. Now members can fill in forms online and never have to worry about mailing or faxing or getting it to us some other way. They can do it all directly online."

"We've been very excited about the ability to do transactions and have that work with iMIS so there's no need to rekey anything and everything is updated as you go," adds Maxwell. "You don't

have to set up multiple things and put information in more than one place. You put the information in iMIS and ISGweb feeds off of it. I can look at iMIS, all the staff members can look at their iMIS reports just as they do now, and everything is there and it is up to date. That's really great."

"Overall, the best thing about ISGweb is that it does what we want it to do," Conley concludes. "It is a really solid, consistent tool for us in helping us grow and expand our business and the way that we do things."



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