

# Does the EPIA Provide Substantial Benefits to Our Members?

*By Stan Williams, EPIA Managing Director*

So now that we know when modern associations got their start and how they were designed to benefit their members, does the EPIA provide the benefits expected and needed by our members?

What is happening between the EU and UK, "*Brexit*" shows what can happen if a member of a group does not feel that they are getting what they feel is adequate for the price they pay. This is very similar to what will happen to the EPIA if we do not benefit members sufficiently to keep them as members. It is only natural for one to believe that if an association does not provide sufficient benefit to each of its members, then those who receive less benefit than the cost of their membership will leave. If a product that cost €1,00 to purchase provides less value than the €1,00 you spend, then why would you buy it? The same principle applies to association membership. If the amount you spend to maintain your membership does not provide at least and preferably more value than the money spent, why would you maintain your membership?

Let's look at a few of the expectations we should have and see how the EPIA meets these expectations.

**Tap into knowledge.** Odds are that someone, somewhere, in the packaged ice industry has already discovered the solution to a vexing problem that you might have. Industry conferences and publications provide opportunities to share your best practices and fresh ideas. Networking with other industry companies makes it much easier to spot emerging trends which could impact your bottom line. If another member has tried something, whether it was successful or a failure, adds a wealth of information to reduce your cost of trial and error. Remember that we are all in this together and by sharing our competitive initiatives and ventures, together we overwhelm other competitors that have elected to "go it alone" and not to be part of the EPIA. Those competitors who elect to not participate in the EPIA activities are at a severe competitive disadvantage and our members who trade in the same market will benefit at the "go it alone" group's expense.

**\*Does the EPIA provide this benefit?** Yes, through annual conventions, articles in our adopted publication, the Ice World Journal, our website sharing, Facebook postings, and direct written and Skype correspondence to our members. But most importantly through networking at our annual convention where people from now 29 countries, where our members reside, gather to exchange ideas.

One of the most important benefits to both producers and supplier members is glaringly evident. Our producers and distributors congregate each year to see what the world's best ice industry suppliers have to offer. What's new in the industry and what trends are happening anywhere in the world? At the same time our world class suppliers not only benefit by getting their wares in front of the largest and most progressive ice producers in Europe, but do this at a fraction of the cost of traveling to each ice producer's location to meet with each packaged ice producer.

**Enhance your reputation.** Trade associations sort out “bad apples” through self-regulation, which bolsters the reputations of all their members. Professional organizations often award credentials and certifications, which can help to build consumer confidence in your products and services.

***\*Does the EPIA provide this benefit?*** Yes, through our HACCP compliance certification requirements for sustained membership. Plus to ensure professional responsibility of our members each of us must be compliant with the EPIA Code of Ethics as defined in our Operational Guidelines. If a member does not conform to both these requirements, they soon find themselves working with the “go it alone” group mentioned above.

**Learning best practices.** All industries have best practices specific to their line of work. If you’re new in the industry and don’t have much experience, limited knowledge or especially ignorance of best practices can pose a serious business and reputational risk. Trade and industry associations provide a forum for promulgating industry-wide best practices, and becoming a member of your industry association gives you a resource to learn what best practices govern your chosen field. Best practices are the trade secrets that were closely held by craftsmen in their guilds in medieval times. It can also give you a head start on compliance when best practices are amended or changed as they are modified and updated periodically through invention, education, or legislation.

***\*Does the EPIA provide this benefit?*** Yes. There are discussions and presentations at every annual convention about HACCP and the importance of conforming to best practices for the production of a healthy and safe products. EPIA’s tagline of ***“Ice you can trust”*** is backed by our requirement for HACCP certification and continual education about why and how to conform to the current health standards in our trading areas.

**Name recognition.** Company ABC operating in a single location might enjoy name recognition within a limited territory, but what about the next city over or a neighboring country? People travel more today than at any time in the history of the world. A traveler from Spain or Italy looking for ice never heard of company ABC who operates in Wroclaw, Poland? But because Ice Art displays the EPIA logo and tagline ***“Ice You Can Trust”*** on its bags, you know the value of the product and can feel secure that it is of the highest quality and safe. Other random ice is just that . . . unknown . . . untested, and of questionable quality.

***\*Does the EPIA provide this benefit?*** Yes. Given the option between trusted and questionable ice products, which would you choose? Choosing the EPIA ice benefits you as an EPIA affiliated producer member and puts your non-EPIA affiliated competitor in a position of not selling his product because the public does not know the quality of his ice or this unknown company’s reputation for providing safe ice.

**Gain political clout and expertise.** Trade associations bring competitors together, turning one small voice into a persuasive, collective shout. This can be particularly helpful when independent businesses need to mobilize quickly, such as when facing proposed political initiatives that threaten the industry. For example, packaging is often regulated at the local and regional level, but packaging companies that are members of international packaging associations will have access to legal experts who are familiar with nationwide and international regulation. Their insight and advice is often crucial when proposed local ordinances arise.

***\*Does the EPIA provide this benefit?*** Yes. There are two initiatives underway at this time to do just that. In Spain the Spanish producers have formed a group to educate and petition the local governments in Spain to tighten and enforce HACCP like regulations. In Italy, Leopoldo, Ice Cube Impianti, and Giuseppe, Polo Nord, are now working together to educate the local communities about the risk of non-HACCP compliant alimentary ice production. The EPIA now must step up our activities in this area and mold these efforts in such a way that benefits our members and sidelines any attempt by government entities to place undue burdens through a broad brush approach that implements ill-conceived regulation on our producers.

**Ice industry suppliers have a channel to reach out to potential customers.** In order to show potential customers what your products are and how they can provide a benefit to packaged ice producers, the potential customers must be aware of your product.

***\*Does the EPIA provide this benefit?*** Yes. The website provides a list of all producer and distributor members as well as all categories of members. As a supplier member, you have easy access to the majority of your packaged ice industry market in Europe. And just as importantly, each year at the time of year when package ice producers are celebrating their recent busy season, we congregate to meet and exchange ideas and learn of each other's successes. This is a very opportunistic time for packaged ice producers to be receptive to our supplier members and actually let down normal defenses and provide an open mind to evaluate our supplier member's products. We meet during the day and just as importantly socialize during the evenings. Old relationships are repaired and made stronger and new relationships are formed.

Not only is this extremely beneficial to suppliers for customer relationship building, but think of the cost benefits. If a supplier member had to visit our ice producer members now in 27 of the 29 different countries where we have members, what would the expense be? Planning time, travel expense, and all the coordination within your companies to show a strong desire to form a relationship with a new customer and to ensure existing customers of your continued desire to support their needs. Meeting these packaged ice producers in a single location with sales barriers relaxed is possibly the very best way to keep the sales doors open with existing customers and open new doors to potential customers. No longer will you have to depend on "cold calling" a potential customer. You just shared a congenial meal with him at the annual convention.

**Association member retention for the EPIA survival.** Member attraction is one thing, but the retention of these same members who joined on a trial basis is not a simple equation. There must be an individual and personalized approach in order to build a solid relationship with each of our members. To complicate matters even more, each category of member has separate and distinct needs and desires that each is looking to the EPIA to provide. Supplier members need a pool of receptive customers and for the producer members, it is exactly the same, a pool of capable suppliers. Each must provide for the other. If we do not have a robust pool of ice producers, it is not sufficiently beneficial to retain our supplier members. If we do not have a pool of capable and diverse supplier members offering world-class products, our producer members do not get their expected benefits needed for member retention. Put simply: discovering what each category of member needs and desires and then providing it to them is the only way to retain members and sustain and grow the value of membership in the EPIA. Not

only should our tag line be "***Ice You Can Trust***", but also "***The EPIA You Can Trust to Provide Needed Benefits***".

Please talk to me at the Venice convention to discuss your ideas for improving your EPIA.