

## **2009-2010 IABC Survey Executive Summary**

### **Becoming the essential professional association**

What does it take for a professional association to be essential to a professional's career?

That's a fundamental question for IABC leadership—both volunteers and staff—to continuously grapple with. As the profession changes, the association must examine the value it provides to members. And, as an association committed to our profession, we must continuously improve what we deliver in order to remain relevant.

In late 2009 and early 2010, more than 2,500 business communication professionals from around the globe shared their views on these questions in a survey conducted by IABC. The results offer insight into business communicators' perceptions, actions and interests, providing key lessons about how an association can stay relevant and become even more essential in supporting a professional's career.

"We must focus on what it takes to be essential," says Mark Schumann, ABC, IABC chair. "From the start this was a study of a professional association's role in a professional's career, and what steps IABC must take to fill this need."

### **Key lessons**

Providing access to content, connections and recognition is the critical role that professional associations fill for business communicators. Acquiring new knowledge to stay on the leading edge of communication, developing deep and lasting connections with other professionals, and gaining recognition—both within the community and with employers—are fundamental factors in a business communicator's decision to become and remain a member.

Supporting this observation are 10 significant lessons that will help to shape how IABC leadership ensures that the association continues to support the needs and interests of business communication professionals.

**1. Business communication professionals take the profession of business communication seriously.** People in our profession choose their work early in their careers and commit themselves to stay on top of what the profession needs.

74% said they are “very committed” to a career in the business communication profession.

84% make career a top priority in their lives, after family and friends.

**2. Business communication professionals take being up to date in the profession of business communication seriously, and want to be recognized for their accomplishments.** This drives their focus on content as a key reason to participate in professional associations.

98% said it is “very important” or “somewhat important” to be “up to date on best practices” in the profession.

80% said it is “very important” or “somewhat important” to be “recognized for accomplishments” in the profession.

74% read “blogs and commentary” to stay current in the profession.

63% said “acquiring new knowledge” or “developing new skills” is the top priority.

**3. Business communication professionals believe in the value of membership in a professional association.** They view a professional association as an important source for the content they feel is essential to their careers. And they evaluate professional associations largely by the content offered.

88% said “access to content and programs offered by a professional association” is “very important” or “somewhat important.”

80% said “membership in a professional association” is “very important” or “somewhat important.”

76% said they turn to professional association web sites (for research, reports and studies) when they need to research a best practice in business communication.

75% said “being involved in a professional association” is “very important” or “somewhat important” to their career aspirations and said “broad-based topical research provided by a professional association” is “very important” or “somewhat important.”

**4. Business communication professionals believe content is the deciding factor in why they access a professional association’s products and programs.**

Respondents said that as they review an association’s offerings, they look for relevant content—offered in person, in print and online.

84% said content is most important when deciding to access an online newsletter.

79% said content is most important when deciding to access a printed magazine.

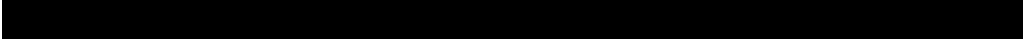
70% said content is most important when deciding to access a digital library.

66% said content is most important when deciding to access practical tools.

59% said content is most important when deciding to access web seminars and teleseminars.

**5. Business communication professionals join IABC to advance their careers.**

When looking at the value provided by IABC, respondents again focused on their careers—and the value provided by content as well as connections and career-building tools and resources.



79% said they joined IABC for connections with other professionals.



76% said they joined IABC for tools and help to advance their career.



70% said they joined IABC for current and compelling information about the profession.



60% said that joining as a student member makes people more likely to join as a professional member.

**6. Business communication professionals believe content is the key to deciding to join, and stay with, IABC.** Again, when looking to IABC, respondents focused on content as a key reason for initially joining the association, in support of what they want to achieve in their professional careers.



83% said content is most important when deciding to read *Communication World* in print or online, or *CW Bulletin* online.



81% said they join IABC to acquire content and knowledge.



80% said they renew their IABC membership to acquire content and knowledge.



77% said content is most important when deciding to participate in an IABC web seminar or teleseminar or purchase Knowledge Centre resources online.



75% said content is the most important factor when deciding to visit [iabc.com](http://iabc.com).



70% said content is the most valuable dimension of the World Conference.

62% said content is most important when deciding to access a blog on IABC eXchange.

58% said access to “current and compelling information about my profession” is the most important reason to be an IABC member.

**7. Most business communication professionals believe IABC should invest in content.** Respondents again focused on content when advising the association on future opportunities, which is consistent with its importance to the role of professional associations in a communicator’s career.

71% of respondents believe IABC should invest in best practices and other professional content to make it easier for members to seek financial support for participation.

70% believe IABC should invest in best practices and other professional content to increase the value it delivers.

**8. Most business communication professionals believe the IABC Research Foundation should invest in content.** As a key component in how the association develops and delivers content, the role of the IABC Research Foundation is viewed as important to how IABC continues to fulfill professionals’ need for content.

70% of respondents believe the IABC Research Foundation should invest more in researching trends in the use of new communication approaches.

64% believe the IABC Research Foundation should invest more in researching the return on investment in corporate communication, employee engagement and social media.

54% believe the IABC Research Foundation should invest more in researching changes in the communication profession.

**9. Business communication professionals also believe IABC should invest in career development and networking.** In addition to investments in content development and delivery, respondents focused on other dimensions of the association's value, including connections and career-building tools and resources.

51% of respondents believe IABC should invest in networking opportunities to secure new members.

50% believe IABC should invest in career development tools and guidance to secure new members.

**10. Most business communication professionals believe IABC is an effective professional association.** Overall, in addition to offering suggestions on future steps the association can take, respondents expressed how they value what IABC is delivering today.

79% of respondents said IABC is a "very effective" or "somewhat effective" source for content about the latest trends in the profession.

78% said IABC is a "very effective" or "somewhat effective" source of knowledge to support career and professional growth.

72% said IABC is a "very effective" or "somewhat effective" source for accreditation in the profession.

71% said IABC is a "very effective" or "somewhat effective" source for recognition in the profession.

70% said IABC is a "very effective" or "somewhat effective" source for career standards in the profession.

[REDACTED]

69% said IABC is a “very effective” or “somewhat effective” global standard for excellence in the profession and a source for career connections.

[REDACTED]

63% said IABC is a “very effective” or “somewhat effective” source for a community of friends in the profession.

[REDACTED]

61% said IABC is a “very effective” or “somewhat effective” voice for the business communication profession.

### **What happens next**

Over the next few months, the IABC executive board will engage volunteers from the association’s chapters and regions—as well as former leaders and key stakeholders in the profession—to continue to examine the findings from the research and to identify short- and long-term steps for the association to pursue.

“In the coming months and years we will continue to demonstrate how IABC listens to you and responds to your interests, providing ever-increasing resources to support your success,” says Julie Freeman, ABC, APR, the association’s president.

“We wish to thank the more than 2,500 business communication professionals who shared their views and provided valuable insight into the ways in which IABC will address the future of professional association membership. Your voices have been heard,” says Freeman.