

Should You Join a Trade Association?

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Have you noticed that associations are all around you? A veritable alphabet soup of acronyms identify groups dedicated to the promotion of similar professions, political views, religions, and even handicaps. There's the familiar AARP, ACLU, NAACP and NRA, as well as thousands of others—small and large—which testify to our need to belong.

These acronyms can be confusing. For example, you may have thought NATO referred to an historic military alliance, but turns out it's also a national group of theater owners. And if you forget to include the final "A" on the National Collegiate Athletic Association, you get NCA—the National Cleaners Association.

Professional associations exist at local, state, regional, national and even global levels. Most are non-profit groups that strive to improve the industry they represent through government representation, training, networking, and pooling of resources to purchase services such as insurance and credit card programs.

Income from membership dues, trade show fees, educational programs and advertisements are used by associations to cover overhead expenses and provide resources to fund member services.

The electrical rebuilding industry is fortunate enough to have two trade associations working to improve business for all of us. The Automotive Parts Remanufacturers Association (APRA) is the largest of these entities and has been around since 1941. Their 1,000 members include a variety of automotive remanufacturers.

APRA President Bill Gager said their chief aim is to provide "representation, promotion and protection" for the rebuilder where the government is concerned.

"The primary responsibility of any trade association is to interface with the federal government or state and local governments," he said. "While individ-

uals always have a voice, they may not always have a business voice. That's the primary thrust of the organization."

The APRA tracks about 20 different issues ranging from design patent regulation to Federal Trade Commission rulings. They also keep an eye on any legislation in the area of recycling operations.

"We want to make sure they include remanufacturers as recyclers," said Gager, who noted the APRA's coinage of the phrase "Remanufacturing: The ultimate form of recycling."

"Sometimes people who work in the government don't have a clue what this industry is all about. We are primarily there to make sure the rebuilder can continue to conduct his business without interference from government," he said.

According to Gager, the APRA also offers approximately 50 different services which "more than pay" members' dues, including the annual Big R Show held in Las Vegas, technical education seminars, management support services, discounted freight and shipping opportunities, and insurance programs.

More than 100 new members have joined the APRA in 2006, making this the largest one-year recruitment of new members since 2001. Gager credits this increase to the association's focus on adding new services such as online technical bulletins and wiring diagrams, and electronic and print publications to help members stay on top of trends and issues.

He said that positive feedback about the Internet resource www.autoelectricpro.com has been particularly strong.

"It primarily saves them time, but it gives them an answer. Just finding the answer to some kind of technical problem is worth the membership dues," said Gager.

Online and print communication is also a big thrust of the Electrical Rebuilder's Association (ERA), founded in 2001 by *Exchange* publisher Polly Shea to focus on the specific needs of the automotive electrical rebuilder. Each ERA member receives a subscription to the *Exchange*, which has been published since 1983 and is the only newspaper produced monthly solely for the electrical rebuilder.

ERA Secretary Bob Thomas said the association's Web site is its

"greatest asset."

"It is full of valuable information and provides an additional platform for members to seek technical help and get it quickly from other members. I believe that's what associations are all about—members helping one another," said Thomas. "Technical education is another area we have tried very hard to enhance and grow, both live seminars and other media like books and DVDs. Our members receive significant discounts on all of them, and we have even more planned for the near future."

The ERA has announced that their Web site guru Wes Grueninger will be heading up a new effort to produce a library of technical DVDs (see "ERA News," page 3).

ERA members also receive two free admissions to the association's annual trade show, which features supplier exhibits, networking, and "wall-to-wall" training opportunities. The 2007 show will be in Portland, Ore., April 26 to 29.

The ERA Technical Education seminars featuring industry icon Joe Davis are another service provided by the association. Davis's syllabus is constantly being updated and his courses get rave reviews all across the country. ERA President Mike Schroeder said that show and seminar attendance, as well as use of online and published technical information, should more than cover membership dues.

"Rebuilders can certainly get the value of their membership back if they will just participate in these things," he said. Their current roll stands at just over 500 rebuilder and supplier members.

Another important function of the ERA is to serve as an advocate and shore up the image of remanufacturers with the automotive repair industry and the public. Last month the association responded to a harsh criticism from a *Motor Age* letter to the editor (see "Industry Responds to Criticism," page 1).

"This is a prime example of the need for the knowledge we can provide rebuilders," said Schroeder. "This is the sort of thing we're working on eliminating. As time goes on this stuff is going to get more complex and the educated rebuilder will be in the driver's seat because we know how things work

together inside.”

So do your homework, ask questions, weigh your options, and join up with other rebuilders to benefit yourself and your industry—ASAP.

For more information on the ERA, go to www.electricalrebuilders.org or phone (636) 584-7400. For more information on the APRA, go to www.apra.org or phone (703) 968-2772.