



# The Future of **LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY—** **Face to Face**

*By Lisa Miller, Lisa Miller & Associates*

In today's fast-paced world, we spend our lives making sure we respond to e-mails, voicemails, memos and other demands for information. We speed dial, do canned letters and notes to cut down on the time it takes us to keep up. There's one arena in which mass or short cut communication methods will actually reduce communication effectiveness in the next decade...and that's the legislative arena.

Association members are the lifeblood of legislative communication and providing a program that is fun and easy to implement so that members will want to get involved in the coming years is the key to ensuring ongoing effective grassroots efforts. Many of us were raised in small towns and know that the key to getting a message across is to share that message over a cup of coffee.

Associations can explore the concept of creating a "Coffee Club" in which members can belong and use the Club as a venue to reach

## *Remembering the Last Decade, continued*

**Aug. 2005** – Hurricane Katrina hits New Orleans, La. and the Gulf Coast

**Dec. 2006** – Sadaam Hussein is hanged for his war crimes

2007 – Home prices drop by 2 to 15 percent in areas of the country causing an increase in the number of foreclosures

2006 – Google purchases YouTube for \$1.65 billion in stocks

2007 – Apple introduces the iPhone

2007 – The Mitchell Reports show the use of anabolic steroids and human growth hormone is widespread in Major League Baseball

out to legislators. Each association member that joins the Coffee Club would commit to having coffee with two legislators per month to keep the legislator informed on what is going on in the marketplace and to bring tips/ideas to the legislator on ways to enhance his/her exposure in the association's industry. There are advantages to belonging to the Coffee Club:

- Each association member that joins the Coffee Club receives a coffee cup lapel pin which indicates they are taking the association's outreach seriously.
- Legislators who agree to be a part of the Coffee Club are provided with the opportunity for the association to donate coffee to the charity of the legislator's choice.
- Members receive "sweeteners" in the form of passes to sporting events or other "perks" because they participate in this grassroots effort and are making a difference.
- Members are provided "stirrers" which are topics of interest to discuss with the legislators – and the member will ensure that the visit is comprised of 15 minutes of industry specific details and 10 minutes of ideas on ways the member can help the legislator.
- The association commits to the legislator that they will never engage in mass mail or bulk e-mail communication efforts as a result of the legislator agreeing to be a part of the Coffee Club.

The Coffee Club, in essence, becomes a repository of stories, anecdotes, and factual information that legislators and members can draw. For example, let's assume an association

that specializes in school safety wants to ensure that legislators are on board with the following priorities:

- Set Florida's K-20 strategy for preparedness and response planning for emergency incidents of all types;
- Create preparedness and response priorities that establish the agenda for funding requests;
- Elevate awareness of Florida's

funding than over a pumpkin spice or hazelnut mocha!

Lastly, the association will want to make sure their school safety initiatives are the 800 pound gorilla in the funding arena and that the program has the largest market share. The association member can act as the "coffee bean counter" and show the legislator that by ensuring appropriate funding for school safety, the hundreds

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K-20 educational priorities within the established domestic security and all-hazards preparedness and response budget and legislative processes to increase K-20 market share.

The Coffee Club association member is the perfect "Barista" to get the legislator on board with these initiatives. First, as most associations know, ensuring a strategy is in place as the foundation for the program and/or initiative of the association is critical. By the second cup of coffee, the legislator can hear what the association's strategy is to make sure schools are able to respond to campus crises.

Second, by prioritizing, or making a "coffee menu" of funding requests and delivering the choices in the form of "Tall," "Grande," or "Venti," the legislator will be more inclined to want to work on the menu. There's no better way to break the news regarding

of students in the K-20 system are protected. The numbers will make the point.

In the second decade of the 21st Century, associations must resist the temptation to eliminate the personal touch. Association budgets will be pinched and will be looking for ways to cut costs. It is vital that the personal legislative touch remain intact and ensure that legislators are engaged on a very basic level. The secret to making sure a legislative agenda is heard is to be sure association members spread the "aroma" of a cup of coffee over the association's subject matter. When association members connect with legislators over coffee, the connection will occur in a way that only exists when a cup of coffee is shared. For those coffee-loving readers, that connection needs no description. ●

*Lisa Miller & Associates (LM&A) provides strategic consulting services to private industry and government. Visit their Web site at [www.lisamillerassociates.com](http://www.lisamillerassociates.com).*

2007 – A student on the Virginia Tech campus goes on a shooting spree leaving over 30 students dead

Nov. 2007 – Mark Zuckerberg sells 1.6 percent of Facebook for \$ 240 Million to Microsoft

Nov. 2008 – Barack Obama elected President of the United States-first African American to hold this position

2007 – The final installment of Harry Potter, *Harry Potter & the Deathly Hallows* is released

Sept. 2008 – US grants financial bailouts for Banking, Real Estate and Auto industries

2009 – Worst recession to hit the US since the early 80's. Unemployment rises to 10.2 percent in October