



Environmental Scan Report

# MAPPING THE FUTURE OF YOUR ASSOCIATION

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**EXECUTIVE  
ABSTRACT**

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Conducted for **ASAE & The Center for Association Leadership**  
by Karl Albrecht International



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*Eight Super-Trends*

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Information in this summary is accurate as of the time of publication and consistent with standards of good practice in the general management community. As research and practice advance, however, standards may change. For this reason, it is recommended that readers evaluate the applicability of any recommendation in light of particular situations and changing standards.

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## Executive Abstract

IN A RECENT ONLINE SURVEY of strategic practices used by associations, less than 3 percent of the 459 respondents reported using planning horizons of 10 years or more. Nearly two-thirds reported horizons of two years at most. In other words, “strategic planning” is rapidly giving way to “strategic evolution.”

In 2005, to assist association executives in preparing for and dealing with strategic evolution, ASAE & The Center for Association Leadership carried on their tradition of conducting a periodic environmental scan of the business environment. The goal: Identify strategic trends that affect the association community.

## Eight Radar Sectors

The 2005 environmental scan study was led by Karl Albrecht, Ph.D. and key consultants from Karl Albrecht International, San Diego, CA. This research team, working closely with the association community, collected and analyzed trends according to the “strategic radar” model, which divides an organization’s business environment into these eight inter-related sectors:

**Customer**—The identity, wants, needs, behaviors, habits, values, and life situations of those who do business with you currently and those with whom you’d like to do business.

**Competitor**—The identity, motives, strengths, weaknesses, current behavior, and potential behavior of the other organizations that compete for your customers’ resources.

**Economic**—The dynamics of markets, capital, critical resources, costs, prices, currency, state of the national economy, and the state of international trade; all of these may affect the buying patterns of the customers, the behavior of competitors, and the opportunities open to your organization.

**Technological**—The technological events, trends, and solutions available or in development that can improve your organization’s capability to create value.

**Social**—The cultural patterns, values, beliefs, trends, styles, preferences, heroes, villains, and conflicts that influence customers’ behavior and define opportunities for new ventures.

**Political**—The processes of national, regional, and local governments, as well as various power groups, that can affect the rules for doing business.

**Legal**—The pattern of laws, lawmaking activity, and litigation that can affect an organization’s success.

**Geophysical**—The physical surroundings of the organization’s facilities and operations, including the ecosystems and natural resources, availability of raw materials, transportation options, proximity to major population centers and sources of skilled talent, and susceptibility to environmental disasters.



### The “Strategic Radar Model”

Note: The material above is adapted from *The Northbound Train: Finding the Purpose, Setting the Direction, Shaping the Destiny of Your Organization*, by Dr. Karl Albrecht. New York: AMACOM, 1994, page 72. See also *Corporate Radar: Tracking the Forces that Are Shaping Your Business*, by Karl Albrecht, New York: AMACOM, 2000, page 14. Used by permission.

## Eight Super-Trends

Using expert and practitioner focus group meetings and electronic voting methods, the research team scored and ranked 200 identified trends in terms of their perceived importance to association executives. After reviewing the top trends within the eight environmental sectors, the research team identified eight “super-trends”—one in each sector. These super-trends are the broad, over-arching developments that are shaping the future of associations and their members.

### Demassification

**1** The mass market is breaking into smaller pieces, as differences in lifestyles, preferences, and priorities further segment the U.S. population. Customers—members and prospective members alike—in these smaller, more specialized, groups are interested in focused efforts to meet their needs, not in a one-size-fits-all package of association products and services.

### Unbundling

**2** Increased competition is pressuring associations to offer their products and services *a la carte* rather than as an organized package. Traditional association value propositions—such as fellowship, personal and professional growth, and mutual assistance—must be delivered via specialized, targeted vehicles (the Web, for example).

### Scrimping

**3** Economically, members—and their employers—are looking for a greater return on their investment in association membership. As unbundling occurs, the risk grows that the association value package will lose its overall appeal.

### Wave 3.1

**4** Alvin Toffler’s “Third Wave” concept—the shift from industrial societies to information-based societies—is well underway in Western countries. Information is becoming a profitless commodity. The competitive advantage lies in enriching professional development, learning, connectivity, and life itself through knowledge.

### Virtualization

**5** A highly mobile society has led to the disintegration of traditional neighborhoods and communities, straining personal relationships, and enhancing the appeal of Web-based “virtual” experiences as a form of fellowship. To maintain their traditional strength as community builders, associations must serve a growing appetite for virtual connections while continuing to offer personal experiences.

### Cyber-Mobbing

**6** The channels of political influence is broadening to include digital broadcast media that offer specialized forums for political discussion and Web-based communities that practice “swarm advocacy” and “smart mobbing.” To attract support for their positions in this crowded public arena—and to gain the attention of elected officials, regulators, and agencies—associations must develop a creative, multi-pronged, and Web-savvy approach to advocacy.

### Scrutiny

**7** Both special-interest legislation and litigation are on the rise, and local, state, and federal laws are introducing more aggressive oversight of association activities. As a result, associations must operate transparently, most notably in the areas of governance, advocacy, and political activity.

### Counter-Americanism

**8** The long-standing dominance of American styles, values, products, and business practices is diminishing with the rise of nationalistic and regionalistic politics (especially in Asia and Europe) and of disagreements with U.S. foreign policy. To operate globally, associations must develop localized models of association culture, governance, politics, and operations.

## Summary of the Eight Super-Trends

ENVIRONMENTAL SECTOR	SUPER-TREND	CHALLENGE TO ASSOCIATIONS
<b>Customer</b>	Demassification (Break-up of the mass market)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Craft increasingly focused and targeted appeals</li> </ul>
<b>Competitor</b>	Unbundling (One-size-fits-all products and services no longer appeal)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determine what member needs can be met through new, imaginative value packages</li> </ul>
<b>Economic</b>	Scrimping (Members want a greater return on their dues investment)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help members rediscover the personal and social payoffs of belonging</li> </ul>
<b>Technology</b>	Wave 3.1 (Knowledge, not information, is the competitive advantage)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Move beyond information products to offer enrichment and learning through the application of knowledge</li> </ul>
<b>Social</b>	Virtualization (People want virtual as well as personal relationships)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to offer “the personal touch” while building and strengthening virtual communities</li> </ul>
<b>Political</b>	Cyber-Mobbing (Web-based communities are organizing for advocacy)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Harness the power of the Web and integrate it with more traditional advocacy methods</li> </ul>
<b>Legal</b>	Scrutiny (New laws for oversight call for greater transparency)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Closely track developments in legal and regulatory areas</li> <li>• Develop a policy framework for ensuring compliance</li> </ul>
<b>Geophysical</b>	Counter-Americanism (U.S. styles, values, products, and approaches no longer dominate the world)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partner with others to develop localized models for association culture, governance, and operations</li> <li>• Develop diverse value packages for non-U.S. members</li> </ul>



## Full Report on the Super-Trends

The full text of the environmental super-trend report, titled *Mapping the Future of Your Association*, is available through the ASAE bookstore at [www.asaenet.org](http://www.asaenet.org). This must have strategic tool contains a wealth of information on strategic trends, potential impacts, and possible responses for your association. It provides a clear understanding of what the issues are and how you can map the trends for organizational success.

## Moving Forward

*“Know where to find the information and how to use it—that’s the secret of success.”*

— ALBERT EINSTEIN

Working in partnership with Karl Albrecht International, ASAE & The Center for Association Leadership are creating a Web-based service that continuously monitors and reports on environmental trends as they develop. This approach will allow us to move beyond traditional, static, scan studies that are published biennially; and transition to a continuous feed of knowledge executives can use regularly in the planning process.

The new scanning project will be based on a dual strategy—gathering information from the environment and figuring out how to incorporate it into association strategy. Developed in response to member requests, the scanning tool will take the form of a Web-based scanning service that will be available 24/7 and will provide access to detailed data on trends, comprehensive

summaries of key issues, and recommended action-planning templates. All will be customizable to your association’s particular requirements, allowing you to map the structure of your specific planning process and incorporate the focused publications, reports, Web sites, and other sources that are important for your industry to monitor.

Initially, CD-ROMs will be released that are complete with an extensive list of trends and interactive planning tools to provide a baseline of information for associations to build upon and customize.

If you are interested in learning more about the environmental scan and other research initiatives, please email [e-scan@asaenet.org](mailto:e-scan@asaenet.org) or visit [www.centeronline.org](http://www.centeronline.org).

## About the Author

**Dr. Karl Albrecht** is a management consultant, futurist, speaker, and a prolific author. In his 25-year career he has worked with many kinds of business organizations in a wide range of industries, world-wide. He has consulted with senior executives and lectured to audiences on all inhabited continents. Karl devotes most of his effort to finding and developing promising new concepts for both organizational and individual effectiveness. He is the author of more than 20 books on various aspects of business performance, including *Service America!: Doing Business in the New Economy* (co-authored with Ron Zemke), which has sold over a half-million copies and is published in seven languages. More detailed information about KAI’s consulting services is available through Karl Albrecht International in San Diego: [Karl@KarlAlbrecht.com](mailto:Karl@KarlAlbrecht.com).

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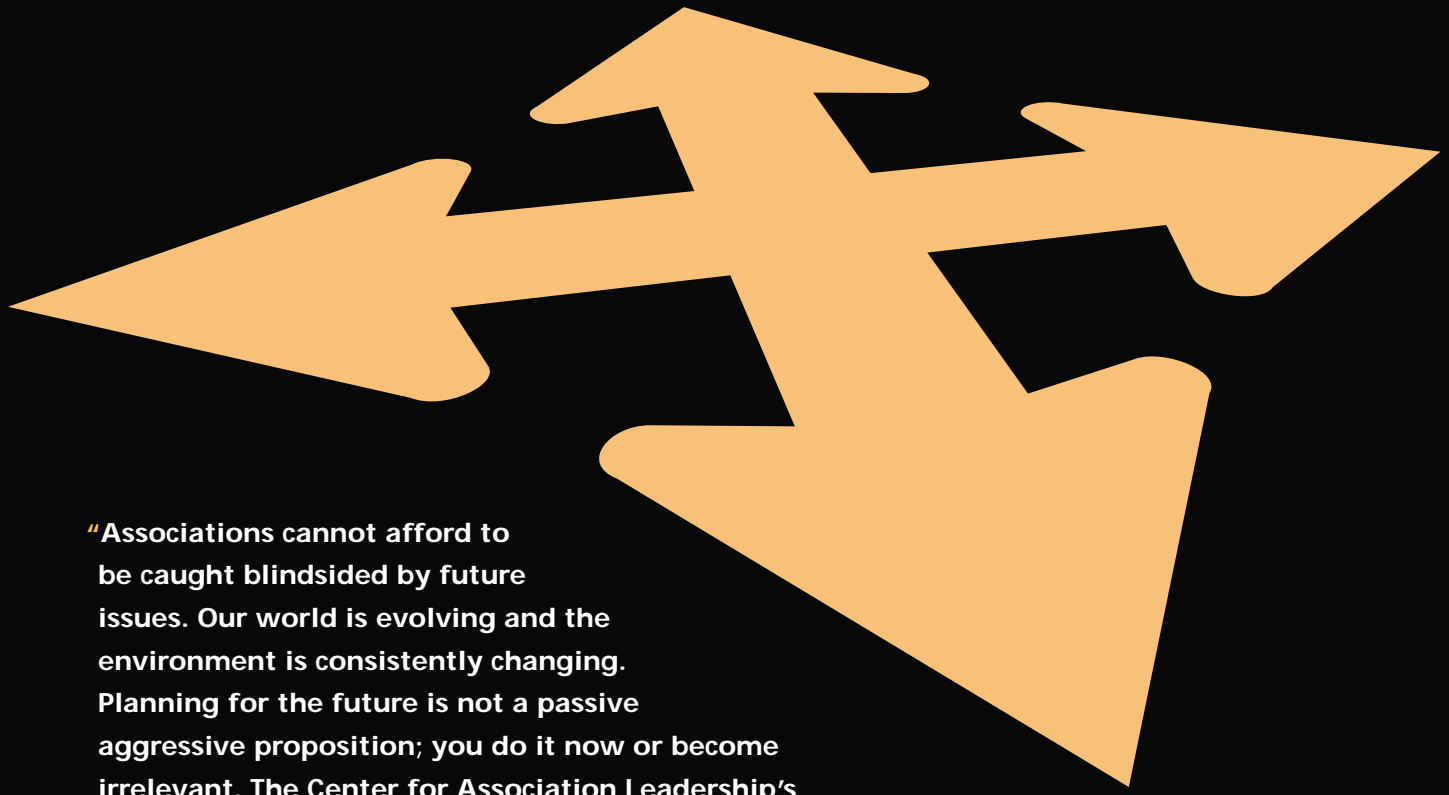
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– **Tom Peters**, leadership and management guru, author of best-selling publications *In Search of Excellence* and *Re-Imagine!*

**“Environmental scanning is not an option, but a priority for visionary nonprofits. The Center for Association Leadership’s environmental scan studies are essential tools for leaders committed to improving their organization’s future.”**

– **Frances Hesselbein**, Chairman, Leader to Leader Institute, formerly Drucker Foundation

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– **Robert Stein, CAE**, Executive Director, American Academy of Ophthalmic Executives