

12. Be active in your users group (or start your own)

If you're using an off-the-shelf association management system (i.e., one that is sold as a product by a vendor to multiple customers), find out if there is a users group for the product and get active in it. (Some examples include the Avectra Users Group, the TIMSS Annual Users Group, and the National iMIS Users Group.)

If there is no formal users group for your software, then create one yourself. Ask your vendor for a list of customers that are using their AMS product and contact them about starting a users group. A users group is just like an association; you can have members, member dues, and regular meetings. The most successful users groups I've been involved with have regular meetings (at least quarterly) and an active listserver. And these groups work very closely with the vendors to ensure long-term success.

REAL LIFE LESSON –

In 1998 I began working at the National Association for College and University Business Officers (NACUBO), in Washington, DC, where I was responsible for the success of the association's database (known as Ablaze). After working in the database for a few weeks I realized that I would need a lot more help figuring out how to use the system, so I contacted Ablaze for help. Finding that the company was unable to answer a lot of my questions, I set about contacting other Ablaze users and formed a loose coalition of associations using the product.

By 2000, the group had begun meeting formally under the auspices of Avectra (the new name for Ablaze) but decided to formally separate from Avectra and become an independent users group. Thus the Independent Avectra Users Group (AUG) was born. As of this writing, the group still meets every other month, has a very active listserver, and is instrumental in contributing to the ongoing development of Avectra's products and services.

13. Start an internal users group

If more than two staff in your organization are using your database, consider establishing an internal users group. An internal users group is a group of core database users who meet periodically to discuss issues with the database.