

PIMA Realigns Training, Development Mission to Better Meet Industry's Needs

PIMA's new president and affiliate chair discuss how the association is restructuring to provide more cost-effective leadership development for the industry's mid-management.

— *By JACK O'BRIEN, EDITOR IN CHIEF*

Survival in today's business climate is every bit as difficult and precarious for professional associations as it is for the companies from which they draw membership and life support—probably more so. In the past five years, a growing number of associations have folded outright or simply dissolved division by division and chapter by chapter until nothing is left but the bare acronyms.

And the cause of death in many of these cases is not just financial, according to some experts in the association arena. More often, it involves a progressive detachment from the core needs of a business or industry and a stilted, outdated infrastructure that operates more like a quagmire than a functional leadership body. Particularly for those associations serving today's struggling, downsized paper industry, restructuring and refocusing their primary mission and path has become critical if not absolutely essential.

The Paper Industry Management Association (PIMA) is one such association that has been overhauling its structure and redefining its purposes and goals during the past few years. As a result, PIMA today is much more streamlined and effective than it was at the turn of this century. The association has fine-tuned and modernized the services it provides to members and member companies, and has plans to expand and make them even more cost-effective in the near future.

To discuss where PIMA currently is and how its recent restructuring and realigned services are better meeting the industry's needs, PaperAge met with Harry Seamans, the association's new National President, and Diane Murdock, 2003-04 Affiliate Chair. Both of these officers have considerable experience in the pulp and paper industry and have served on PIMA's various committees and groups for many years.

The highlights of PaperAge's discussion with Seamans and Murdock are summarized below. Their thoughts and opinions have been combined into a single response for each question, and from that perspective represent a consensus view of the association's current leadership. Any additional questions that readers might have can be sent to info@paperage.com. Responses will be subsequently published as Letters to the Editor.

PaperAge: The protracted downturn in our economy has affected both producers and suppliers in almost all industry and business sectors, pulp and paper especially. Professional organizations have also been hit hard during the past five or so years. In this regard, what is the current state-of-the-association at PIMA?



Harry Seamans, PIMA's 2003-04 National President, is VP of the Pulp and Paper Division of Pottlatch Corp. He spent 25 years at the company's McGehee, Ark., mill, including the past eight years as mill manager. At PIMA, he served as co-president of the Dixie Division and was a member of the National Board of Directors before being named National President this past June.

PIMA: PIMA is an association of the industry's leaders and managers, so we are extremely cognizant and close to the economic pressures. While our membership is down a bit, it is less than the industry downsizing. But attendance at newer type offerings is increased over traditional offerings. As managers in their own daily environment, PIMA leaders innately have skills they bring to carry out PIMA's mission of serving the industry by identifying training and professional development needs and providing forums to address industry issues.

The Executive Committee is comprised of board officers from both the industry and affiliate sides who share communications and the decision-making process regarding operations. The Executive Committee along with the broader PIMA Board deals with the larger strategic issues. This structure provides for continuity and a smooth transition of the volunteer roles. AMC is a management company that enables us to have a dedicated core PIMA staff and the rapid flexibility of accessing additional on-site skills as needed without carrying the overhead costs. For example, rather than carry the cost of a full-time HR/Benefits professional, we share the costs with other AMC clients and only pay for the hours we use.

PaperAge: What are some of the biggest challenges PIMA faces today if it is to continue playing a major role in the betterment of the industry it serves?

PIMA: The biggest challenge is to convince the industry that what we are offering is valuable. If we do, the companies will support the association. PIMA's opinion is that companies want and need good leadership training and professional development for the middle managers, and that companies will support PIMA if we provide:

- Cost effective leadership development opportunities
- Located in or close to the mills so that little time is lost from the job
- Giving the participants tools that can be applied immediately upon return to the job.

We are focusing most of our effort on these areas by utilizing the 11 divisions to provide the training opportunities. We are also providing webcast training that is brought right to the members' computers as an ultimate means of providing the cost effective and effective leadership development.

The other challenge is changing and letting the things go that are not viewed as valuable. An instance of that is how we are changing our national conference. We are combining our normal conference with the IT annual conference and also with the division conference in the region of the meeting, which this year is the Dixie Division, since the conference will be in New Orleans.



Diane Murdock, PIMA's 2003-04 National Affiliate Chair, is director-business development at Appleton International Inc. She is a member of PIMA's Executive Committee and Board of Directors, and has more than 30 years of experience in the paper industry. A TAPPI Fellow she also served on that association's Board of Directors.

PaperAge: In a nutshell, PIMA's stated mission is to provide forums for its members to address relevant industry issues and to develop/improve management and leadership skills. Is this mission still as pertinent today as it was in 1919 when the organization was first formed as the American Pulp and Paper Mill Superintendent's Association?

PIMA: Back in 1919, the paper mill superintendents saw a need to get together to learn from each other and to help the industry. Today, we see the need still exists for middle managers to have an awareness of what's going on in the industry and a way to improve their leadership skills. PIMA is the only organization for the middle managers, and the only leadership oriented association in our industry. The way PIMA is evolving is to be more focused on how we provide this awareness and leadership skills development to this group.

PaperAge: National PIMA has conducted two major conferences in the recent past—the IT conference (with its IT Group) and the long-running Annual International Management Conference. Next year, the management and IT conferences are being combined in New Orleans, again with a shortened schedule. Is this effectively the end of the annual management conference?

PIMA: Combining the IT and International Management Conferences provides great synergies, but does not eliminate the distinction of either conference. IT attendees will join the entire group for the Presidents'



Outgoing president Ray Heuchling passes the gavel to Harry Seamans, PIMA's 2003-04 National President. Mr. Seamans is VP of the Pulp and Paper Division of Potlatch Corp. He spent 25 years at the company's McGehee, Ark., mill, including the past eight years as mill manager. At PIMA, he served as co-president of the Dixie Division and was a member of the National Board of Directors before being named National President this past June.

Panel, which is designed to provide awareness to the middle managers about the industry, but the two groups will have some simultaneous specific skills training sessions designed for one group or the other. The IT group has traditionally had a successful IT trade show that will be continued and should be an attraction to managers outside IT also. The synergies derived from the combination and the savings in costs by utilizing the same site will add to the value that each attendee receives and reduce the overall cost of the conference too. This will be the 85th Annual Conference as well as the 36th IT Conference, in New Orleans.

PaperAge: PIMA's 11 divisions also conduct periodic conferences in various regions of the U.S., often multi-day programs including a special event such as a golf outing, theme party/dance, etc. Do you see these formats evolving toward shorter, less social, more learning specific events, perhaps closer to mills?

PIMA: This is going to be a year of transition for the divisions. Multi-day conferences are not being attended like they were a few years ago, and I don't think they will

come back. PIMA divisions are going away from these type conferences, which are taking employees away from their jobs too long. Short one day or half day events that are focused on obtaining leadership skills that can be used the next day in their jobs is where the divisions will be concentrating.

In a recent meeting with our Southwest Division, their leaders decided to have these types of training events at the mill locations, which is a great idea. These events might be a speaker, a short seminar or workshop, or a round table discussion. We are also encouraging the divisions to continue a practice of combining efforts with the TAPPI chapters in their regions to improve the offerings (such as an integrated tract of management/technical sessions) to members.

PaperAge: Could you explain PIMA's relationship with CPBIS?

PIMA: We have an alliance with CPBIS (and now Georgia Tech) that means we work together on a wide array of training and professional development opportunities, webcasts, continuing education, face-to-face, etc.

PaperAge: Do you see these evolving in the future...or perhaps similar relationships developing with other groups?

PIMA: Yes. Our most recent alliance is with AMA. All PIMA members are now automatically members of AMA and can utilize AMA products at a discounted rate.

PaperAge: The PIMA National president and affiliate chair currently serve only one year. The top officers of some organizations, such as AF&PA, serve multiple years to allow more time to implement vision and policy. Do you think that PIMA needs to extend the terms of these positions to at least two years?

PIMA: You are right about the problem that can exist when top officers only truly lead for one year. At PIMA, we've addressed this in a different way. Beginning this past year, we established a working executive committee of seven officers and the Executive Director. We don't have just one or two people leading the association for the year. We have the consensus of this working executive committee to do it. In that way, when two of the leaders leave at the end of the year, there are five left to carry on the strategy that the committee developed. Two

new officers are brought in who will be part of the committee for three or four years.

PaperAge: Can you explain and elaborate on the theme of next year's conference in New Orleans—"Don't just Survive – Thrive!"? What are your expectations for this combined event—program, attendance, exhibit, etc.?

PIMA: Too often people get caught up in waiting for something to happen to make things better. This approach not only has little chance of succeeding, it is a depressing way to work. It is much more fun and rewarding to proactively make things happen. The theme, "Don't just survive, Thrive" is related to what we are doing at PIMA and to what we believe that our industry should be doing. We have to take the reins and move ourselves forward, and that is what we intend to do with the conference.

We will continue with the things that are good about the conference such as the President's Panel. This is an

opportunity for the middle managers to get a bigger view of the industry—maybe their only first-hand view of the bigger picture. Beyond that, we will be using the sessions to provide leadership skills to leaders and potential leaders in our industry. The object is to provide tools that can be taken back to the work site and used immediately to improve performance and get results through people. The IT sessions will coincide with leadership sessions in some cases, but there will also be single sessions where the combination makes sense for both groups.

The exhibits will be an IT focus, but we are going to try to also bring in some leadership oriented exhibits too.

Considering that we are bringing together the IT conference and the Dixie Division conference together with the annual leadership conference, we are expecting to increase attendance from previous years to about 500. What is more important is the value delivered to those 500. ■

"Your career is directly dependent on your skill level," says Jim McNutt, CPBIS Executive Director.

“When your
knowledge base
stagnates, you
become dispensable.”

The 5 day course will occur
in January/February 2004

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