PEOPLE HERE IN CHICAGO
with jobs like mine listen when Dean West, a colleague who runs a consultancy called Association Laboratory, talks about the business of association management.

One of Dean’s latest offerings, Looking Forward 2013, is an environmental scanning white paper that identifies critical factors affecting associations and potential implications for association strategy. It is based on input from 28 association chief staff officers and 26 senior association executives representing 55 different industries and professions.

While there’s much to be learned from the 29-page study, two segments dealing with what you might call the new rules of engagement for organizations like STLE are worth a direct citation.

Point one stresses that: “Members will place a greater priority on associations that can serve their specific and most relevant needs effectively in a cost-conscious environment...In an environment in which individual and organizational members are much more selective of association memberships, they will look for a stronger relationship between professional relevance and organizational return on investment.”

Closely related to this first point is the notion of how an organization like STLE establishes this type of high-ROI relationship: “Online strategies will gain in importance as associations seek to serve more geographically distributed audiences through customized content strategies or integrated content-delivery strategies. Individuals continue to see events as very important activities, but they are prioritizing their attendance more aggressively.”

Delivering a more targeted education program with greater ROI has been part of STLE’s strategy during the past two years. Traditional education vehicles such as local section lube schools and annual meeting courses remain very much a core part of STLE’s education program. But added to the mix is our Webinar-education program offered online through STLE University.

By the end of this year, STLE will have presented and archived more than 60 Webinars with an estimated audience of more than 2,000 participants. The cost to attend a live Webinar, or access the recorded version, is only $39 for STLE members and $59 for non-members. Topics have ranged from engine oil formulation to food grade lubricants. A complete program list is available at www.stle.org.

Self-study courses offer a slightly different educational experience but with the same combination of expertise and affordability. There are four online short courses (priced at $29 and $49) covering Basic Lubrication (friction, lubrication and wear), Lubricant Composition (additives, base oils and grease), Metalworking Fluids (types and functions) and Fluid Management and Recycling (how to justify and implement a plant program).

A Fundamentals of Lubrication certificate course ($79 and $99) provides a much more in-depth and interactive introduction to the principles of friction, lubrication and wear. This course includes an assessment test that is supported by a certificate of completion for those who need to document their participation.

While we’re on the right track in terms of adding ROI to STLE’s education program, there’s always room for improvement. That’s why STLE is currently working with Association Laboratory on a Membership Value Survey that will assess the needs and expectations of our members.

The information collected through this survey will be used to guide STLE and help leadership find ways to improve the organization. We see it as another important step toward reaching our goal as an organization: to be the preferred source of technical knowledge that can give your organization a distinct competitive advantage in today’s complex business environment.

New rules for membership value
STLE is scanning the environment to better understand your needs.