

Associations deserve an unadulterated plug

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The Australian Investors Association (AIA) had its national conference this week in Sydney. It has more than 2500 members and more than 300 turned up for about 40 presentations that covered everything from the sharemarket to property, estate planning, superannuation, managed funds, exchange-traded funds, microcaps, building wealth for children and stock analysis. You are unlikely to find a better-looking line-up of presenters anywhere else - well, not until its next national conference, anyway.



It is remarkable the people it attracts, many of whom only ever come out for this type of organisation - one that has its members' interests rather than its own at heart. There is some integrity in the industry after all.

There are only a few organisations in the sharemarket that the private investor can trust and perhaps unsurprisingly they all seem to be non-profit-making. They include the AIA, the Australian Shareholders' Association (ASA) and the Australian Technical Analysts Association (ATAA). They all offer access - not to a product, trading platform or leveraged derivative promise that you too can transform into a successful foreign exchange trader from the depths of your unit in Whoop Whoop, but to people such as yourself. The motto of the AIA sums it up as "Investors helping investors" and if you've ever attended its national conference, had 20 coffee breaks, nine meals and a few happy hours with the other 300 people in the same boat as you, you'll know that's true.

Outside all that, these organisations also offer year-round, locally organised events in all the major capital cities (and beyond) and for the paltry sum of \$130 a year for the AIA, \$115 for the ASA and \$240 for the ATAA, you get access to their resources, their meetings and, therefore, their members. Admittedly, some meetings such as the annual conferences cost a bit extra but you'll eat and drink your way through most of those fees while the speakers, presentations and education is at cost if there is one and rubbing shoulders with like-minded investors is priceless.

The AIA has been around since 1991, the ASA since 1960 and the ATAA since 1990. The AIA says it "exists for one purpose: to help our members become more successful long-term investors" and to "protect and advance the interests of Australian investors

across all types of investments and asset classes including shares, cash, property, self-managed superannuation funds and managed funds". It only takes individuals as members, so policy is formulated without the influences of corporate purpose.

The ASA says it is there to "protect and advance the interests of investors" by "raising the standard of corporate governance in Australian companies". It actively pushes for "improvements in transparency and accountability in relation to company performance, executive remuneration, treatment of minority shareholders, risk management and dividend policy".

The ATAA states the aim of "promoting the correct use of technical analysis" and that "the focus of the association is the provision of education to enable members to be more effective traders and investors".

Of course, none of these associations have the marketing budgets or the profile they deserve because they are non-profit-making. As a result, the success of their events and the growth in their memberships is not bought by slick television and press ads but is hard won by individuals whose primary motive isn't money but their generous interest in spreading the word for the benefit of others.

Despite that, they survive. They do so because their memberships, once discovered, persist because on any assessment of intrinsic value and price versus reliability, they top the scales. In a market now patrolled by a pack of predator products that dress up the sharemarket as a Porsche-driving party, their role in keeping investors, especially new investors, off the wrong track and on the straight and narrow is even more critical now than at any time in their histories.

So I have given over my 700 words this week in an unadulterated plug for the three of them, to redress the advertising balance, because too many people tread the investment journey alone, too many people are being picked off and too few have any opportunity to share their emotions and experiences with others. It doesn't have to be that way.

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