

# Resilience and AI-agents



The ways in which associations can build resilience, is not very different than for other companies. It involves strong leadership, focus on engagement with members, financial stability and strategic partnerships. The one element that could be helpful in achieving all of these is technology, and more specifically the use of artificial intelligence (AI) agents. While still at early stages now, it could become a game-changer for many companies, including associations.

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Many associations have gone through some type of crisis in recent years, often as a result of elements beyond their direct control such as pandemic, geopolitical or other sources of instability. In addition, we are living in a world which is rapidly changing on many fronts, from generational shifts to digitalisation. In such an environment, it is more important than ever that associations are resilient. Amongst other things, this involves the efficient and effective use of the limited resources associations have at their disposal.

The use of AI is definitely helpful. The vast majority of my colleagues already use different forms of AI – such as **Microsoft Copilot**, **ChatGPT** or IBM's **Watsonx** – for a wide range of tasks, including writing articles like this one. It saves a tremendous amount of time and while final checks are still required, the results are getting better by the day. However, this use of AI – called AI automation – is still very much based on the instructions given: you ask AI to go through a set of steps, with at least one step involving an interaction with a Large Language Model (LLM).

With a rapidly increasing number of applications already available, the next step is the use of AI agents. These agents leverage data to execute self-determined tasks aimed at achieving pre-set goals. The big difference is that the AI-agent will determine itself how to achieve a goal, it does not longer need instructions on the different steps to take. And because there is also an element of memory, it will continuously improve its performance.

Big players like IBM and Microsoft are already active in this area, along with about 600 start-ups, representing a market value of about 5 billion USD, which is expected to grow to 47 billion USD by 2030.

Now, what is in it for associations? Well, let's think about member engagement and communicating member benefits effectively, which is a challenge for 64% of associations worldwide – according to the *2024 Naylor Association Benchmarking Report*. Using an AI-agent like Claude Computer Use – which is just one of the many solutions out there – can be of massive help in achieving that goal. Using all the data sources at its disposal (both internal and external), the agent will create a strategy, define the steps to be taken, establish a planning, execute the tasks, track and report results and adapt in function of feedback received. So, it is not just about content creation; it is about establishing a strategy to achieve a predetermined goal and executing that strategy. One aspect which I found really interesting is the level of personalisation these platforms can achieve by combining all data available – from the internal CRM system to all types of information available via the internet – resulting in increased engagement.

There are a few factors to consider before jumping in. The technology is still at its early stage, so it might not have yet the full understanding of the field you work in or the goals you want to achieve. At a certain moment, it is also possible you will need to use different agents with different skills sets – similar to the use of employees with different skill sets – in which case you need to think about the use of a 'multi-agent'. Finally, cost is a key factor, including both licensing fees and the investment required to train staff.

The good news is that the technology is becoming more accessible, also for 'non-coding people' like myself, with easy-to-use browsers and apps, that allow us to explore the opportunities this technology can provide to become more resilient and more prepared for a rapidly changing environment.