

Why It Pays to Be a Leader

AIST 2008 Membership Survey Results

The results are in! In tough economic times, it's important to obtain maximum value from any association membership. Our 2008 member survey results attest not only that our association has grown stronger since inception, but that involvement is key to achieving the maximum benefit of AIST membership.

In September 2008, AIST conducted a member survey to determine current member satisfaction with existing programs, products and services. With any member-based association, it is important to gauge member fulfillment and improve services wherever necessary. Obtaining this information enables AIST to continue to provide valuable benefits, determine factors affecting growth and retention, and assist in the development of a strategic plan to better serve our members in the future.

The 36-question Web-based survey was released on Sept. 30. An e-mail invitation to participate in the survey was sent to all AIST members with valid e-mail addresses (9,295). In a 17-day period, 678 total responses were received, yielding a 7.3% response rate. On average, the survey took 10 minutes to complete.



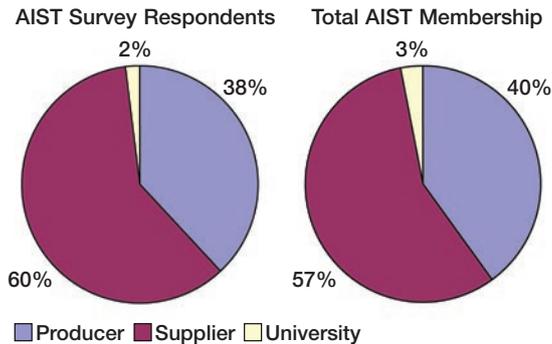
Author

Stacy Varnecky, membership communications manager, Association for Iron & Steel Technology (svarnecky@aist.org)

Who Responded?

The survey included questions that defined the responding population by years of membership, participation level, steel industry affiliation, career level and citizenship. Although the response rate was low, the correlation of steel industry affiliation confirmed the sampling aligned closely with our total member base (Figure 1).

Figure 1



AIST survey respondents vs. total AIST membership.

When asked how many years the individuals were members of AIST, 64% had been members for more than 5 years, while only 36% had been members for less than that. Regarding career level, respondents identified themselves as:

Entry Level	3.5%
Mid Level	48%
Senior Level, but Not Chief Executive	40%
Chief Executive	8.5%

2008 vs. 2004

The survey was designed to include a segment of questions extracted from a previous AIST member survey sent in 2004. The purpose was to identify whether member satisfaction with services has improved and whether members perceive that their needs are being better met now than in the past. The responses from this segment were particularly encouraging, as the 2008 results show improvement over 2004. Table 1 provides an overview of these results.

Member Satisfaction and Importance

Another key segment of the survey was the determination of member benefit importance and satisfaction. Respondents were asked to rank the AIST member benefits by importance and then by satisfaction, both on a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high). Figures 2 and 3 on the following pages display the detail of these results, not only for our members, but for our leaders as well.

Table 1

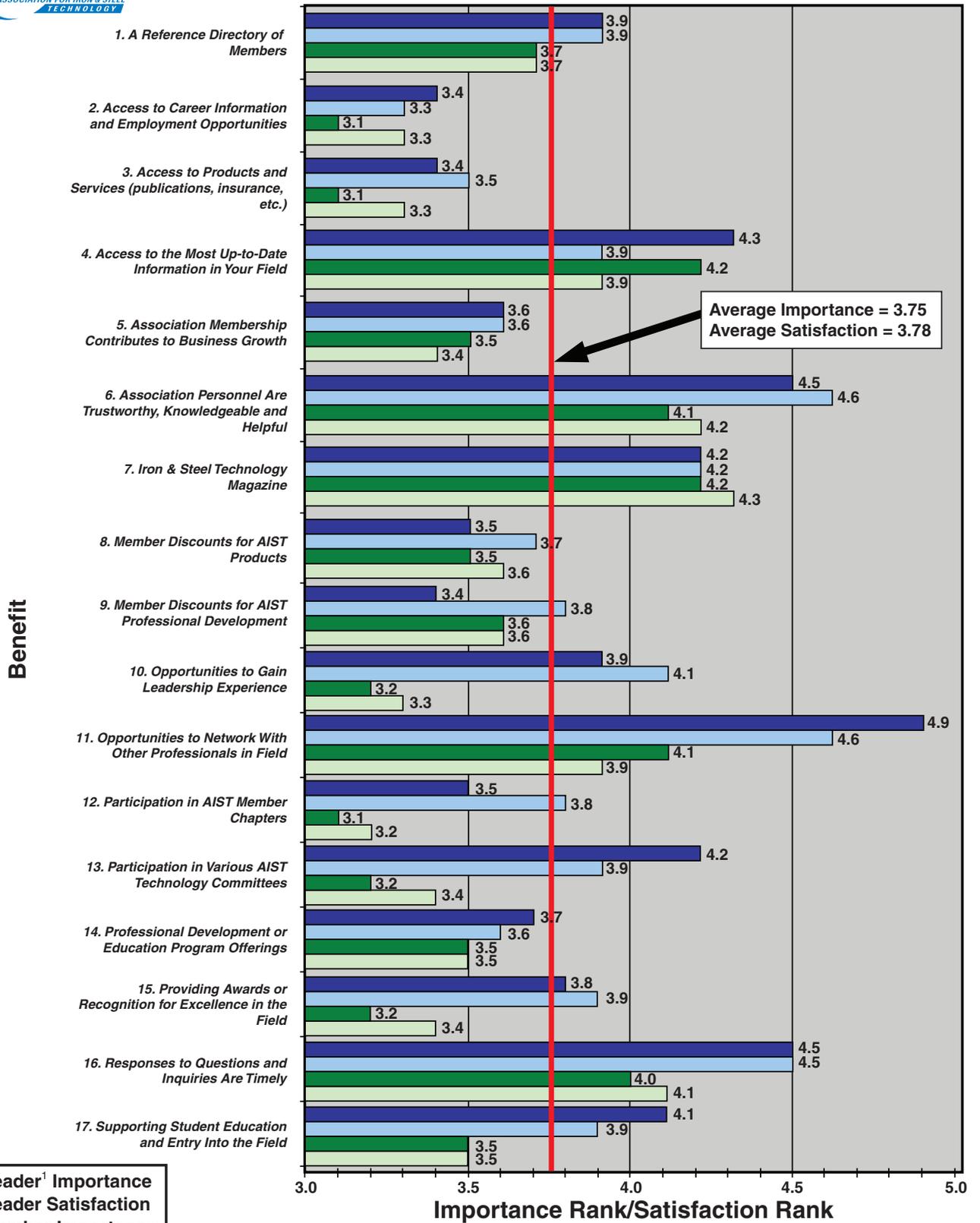
Question/Answer	2008	2004
Q. Employer funds my AIST membership? A. Yes	78%	73%
Q. Employer supports my participation? A. Very supportive	59%	45%
Q. Do you participate on a Technology Committee? A. Yes	33%	25%
Q. Technology Committees cover my area of expertise? A. Yes	80%	55%
Q. Do you attend local chapter meetings? A. Yes	32%	25%
Q. <i>Iron & Steel Technology</i> content is useful? A. Yes	95%	93%
Q. <i>I&ST</i> provides sufficient information for the following:		
• Technical news A. Yes	93%	91%
• Technology Committee information A. Yes	81%	66%
• Member Chapter information A. Yes	78%	63%
• Specialty Training Conferences A. Yes	91%	85%
• Major conferences and expositions A. Yes	94%	90%
Q. <i>www.SteelNews.com</i> content is useful A. Yes	67%	61%



Figure 2



Evaluating AIST Benefits How Important Are They? How Satisfied Am I?



Base: Leader – 33; Member – 645

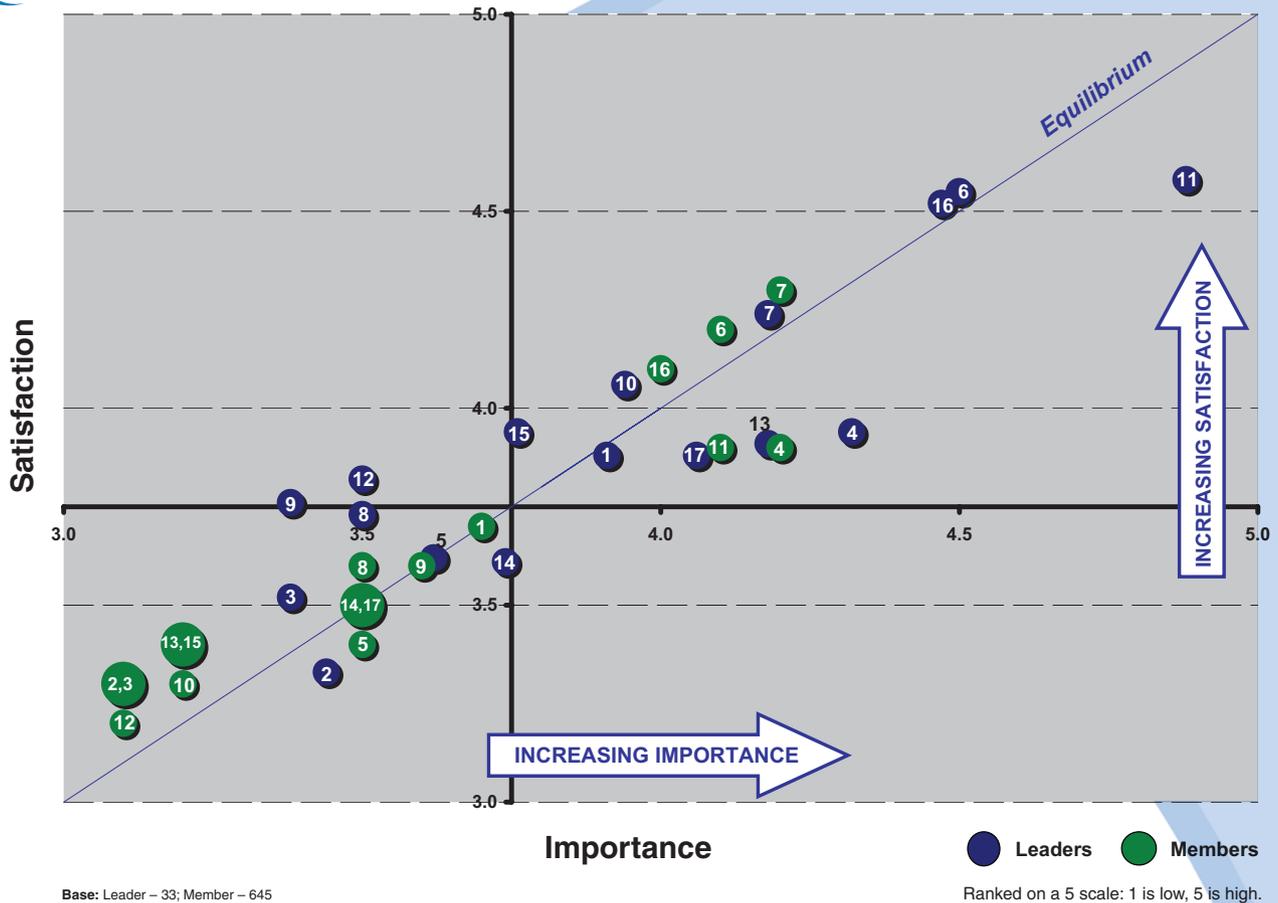
Ranked on a 5 scale: 1 is low, 5 is high.

¹ Leader – includes members holding: Chair or Vice Chair position for AIST Technology Committees; Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary or Treasurer position for AIST Member Chapters; AIST Board of Director position; or AIST Board of Trustee position.

Figure 3



Evaluating AIST Benefits Establishing Equilibrium Between Importance and Satisfaction



The importance of individual aspects of AIST membership is illustrated in Figure 2. For each member benefit, we asked the respondents two questions: (1) How *important* is it? and (2) How *satisfied* are you with it? With a 0.03 differential between the rankings of average *importance* and average *satisfaction*, our survey respondents were pleased overall with the return on their AIST investment. However, our association's leaders¹ consistently placed a higher degree of *importance* on their AIST benefits, when compared to the "less involved" member. The corresponding higher levels of leader *satisfaction* emphasize the value of their involvement.

When evaluating benefits, it is important to employ the association's resources wisely to ensure items deemed to be more important maintain a high level of satisfaction. Figure 3 helps to establish equilibrium between *importance* and *satisfaction*. Benefits located closest to the equilibrium line are the most balanced with regard to perceived *importance* and resulting *satisfaction*. Generally, there was good correlation across the board, reinforcing the notion that AIST resources are properly deployed for maximum benefit. However, several items do require more attention.

Opportunities to network with other professionals in the field (item 11) is the most *important* benefit for the AIST leadership, and one that needs more attention to raise its level of respondent *satisfaction*. Access to the most up-to-date information (item 4) was also



deemed to be quite important by both our leaders and our other members, and both groups felt more improvement in this area was needed.

Why It Pays to Be a Leader

The figures on pages 254–255 demonstrate that, overall, our association leaders have ranked the benefits with greater importance and satisfaction than “less involved” members. This research statistically proves

that our association leaders acquire greater member benefit than the “less involved” members, therefore yielding a greater return on their investment.

Get Involved With Your Association

Make the choice to invest in your future and the future of steel by participating actively in AIST. There are many ways you can participate:

- Get involved with an AIST Technology Committee related to your area of technical expertise.
- Attend a Member Chapter event.
- Submit a paper for presentation at an AIST conference.
- Offer to teach a short course at a Member Chapter or national meeting.
- Donate to the AIST Foundation to fund industry scholarships.
- Recruit a friend to become an AIST member and take an active role.
- Recommend activities and services that can help attract new members.



Mark Mobberly
Manager, Electrical Engineering, U. S. Steel — Lorain Pipe Mill, Lorain, Ohio, Northeastern Ohio Chapter Chair

“Serving in a leadership capacity with AIST can be rewarding in that it avails another opportunity to refine one’s leadership and facilitation skills. It allows one to truly ‘make a difference’ in the course the association takes. It also fosters a broader and deeper understanding of the industry as a whole...outside of one’s immediate occupation, position or location. Lastly, relationships with industry peers are also broader and deeper as a result of serving in a leadership capacity.”



Eric Almquist
Engineer, Star Tool & Die Works Inc., Oakdale, Minn., Tinplate & Electrogalvanizing Technology Committee Chair

“AIST allowed me the networking opportunities to establish direct contact with plant-level management at the Cherepovets plant. Without AIST, my committee participation or my committee leadership opportunity, it would have been very unlikely for me to obtain the plant management-level contacts I’ve attained. For that, I say ‘Thanks AIST!’”



James Finley
Refractories Supervisor, ArcelorMittal Indiana Harbor, East Chicago, Ind., Midwest Member Chapter Chair

“As officer in the Midwest Chapter of AIST, I have gained valuable experience as a leader. I was able to apply trained skills in public speaking, event planning, conducting professional meetings, and team and relationship building — all while having fun. Most of all the time spent at the Leadership Conferences provided a networking environment that will stay with me throughout my career.”

By participating, you gain the opportunity to qualify for leadership positions within the association. The benefits of being an active leader can be both personal and professional, and can provide you with skills that can be applied to many areas of your life. These include:

- Increased opportunities to mentor, be mentored, gain peer recognition, share expertise and ideas.
- Enhanced personal and professional development through increased communication and organization skills.
- Expand your public speaking skills by articulating views diplomatically to a diverse membership.

Word-of-Mouth Marketing (WOMM)

No surprise here! When our members were asked how they first learned about AIST, 61% of the respondents said colleague or co-worker, while 8% selected Specialty Conference/AISTech and 6% confirmed professor or university program. Because of the personal nature of the communication between individuals, AIST information communicated by WOMM has an added layer of credibility. Research proves that individuals are more inclined to believe WOMM than more formal promotional methods.

Continued positive word of mouth has expanded AIST's network and resulted in a greater value to our members. Opportunities to network with other professionals in the field was ranked as the most important benefit by our leaders. With the majority of new members hearing about AIST through word of mouth, the message is clear: keep on talking!

AIST Members Have Spoken

Survey respondents offered the following advice regarding how AIST could improve its membership experience and make membership more valuable:

- Add a forum in the magazine that would focus on suppliers a bit more, their products and how they are important to and used by the mills. Perhaps highlight different areas of supply: raw materials, consumables, equipment supply and repair/maintenance, specialty providers (high heat protection, software apps) and so on. Maybe let the readers have input to the magazine regarding what they want to know more about.
- Have Technology Committee meetings through the Web or provide Web-based groups/communities moderated by the committees and allow members to participate.
- Chapters should have at least four meetings a year.
- As a European, I would appreciate actions to create stronger ties between the U.S. and other global regions. As an example: conference with special events/workshops on this topic and/or events on other continents.
- As I live in France, AIST keeps me connected to the steel community in the USA. Unfortunately, we have no AIST local gatherings in Europe; maybe we could!
- Besides doing tours of steel mills all the time, AIST should offer tours of supporting vendor facilities.
- Attract more steel companies to exhibit at AISTech.
- Continue to focus on recruiting more students to become engineers, more college engineers to be materials engineers, and more materials engineers to join the steel industry.
- Offer more classes for new engineers in the steel industry.

AIST is proud of this feedback in terms of what it says about our association. We would like to thank everyone who took the time to respond to the survey. We take the results very seriously and will use them as a basis to guide our programs, products and services over the next year.

Make the choice to invest in your future and the future of steel by participating actively in AIST.

If you have any more comments, additional ideas, or didn't have time to reply to the survey, you can e-mail the Membership Team at membership@aist.org at any time to give us your feedback.

For those who wish to investigate further, the detailed survey findings are available at www.aist.org. You may also contact Stacy Varnecky, membership communications manager, at svarnecky@aist.org or (724) 814-3066 to learn more about the volunteer opportunities available and begin receiving a greater return on your investment today. ♦

