

SMS: A Partnership Approach to Association Management

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For over 18 years, Tony Seddon, Founder and Chief Executive and the team at [Seddon Management Services](#) (SMS) have been quietly revolutionising the world of association management, specifically geared towards supporting non-profit, trade associations and professional bodies.

Their secret? A deeply personal, hands-on approach that prioritises understanding the unique needs of each client and their members.

From humble beginnings working with the Road Surface Treatment Association, Tony's passion for the field ignited, leading him to establish SMS in 2007. "The biggest lesson I learned early on was the importance of people skills," Tony explains. "You need to be able to talk, interact, listen, and understand what the associations and their members need and want. Our aim has always been to try to make their world better."

This philosophy permeates every aspect of SMS's operations. Tony, a self-described "family man," leads his team with fairness and openness, fostering a collaborative environment where everyone is empowered to contribute. "I don't man-mark my team," he says, emphasising trust and individual responsibility. This approach translates to a highly motivated team with diverse expertise, capable of handling everything from back-office administration, financial services, and membership support to specialised health and safety consulting and governance.

SMS doesn't just manage associations; they become deeply embedded in their clients' worlds. Tony's technical expertise, honed through years of experience and active involvement in organisations like the European Standards Committee for Safety Netting and the Access Industry Forum, allows him to engage

with clients on a deeper level. “We roll up our sleeves and get stuck in!” Tony declares. “I firmly believe that to deliver tangible differences for our clients, we need to understand their businesses. We need to understand the technical aspects of their world to be able to support them.”

This commitment to understanding client needs has allowed SMS to navigate the evolving association landscape successfully. Recognising the increasing complexity of member businesses, SMS has championed member audits, focusing on organisational quality, management capabilities, and corporate governance. This proactive approach, driven in part by tragedies like the Grenfell Tower fire, demonstrates SMS’s dedication to keeping members safe and compliant.

SMS’s vision for the future of association management involves building stronger partnerships and diversifying services to provide even greater value to members. The ultimate goal? “Getting people home safely at the end of the day!” This singular focus drives everything SMS does, from developing best practice guidelines to working closely with the HSE to shape industry standards.

Beyond financial metrics, SMS measures success by the happiness and well-being of their clients and their members. “If our clients are happy, then we are happy,” Tony

states. He also emphasises the importance of member feedback, which is actively solicited and used to improve services. This client-centric approach has resulted in long-term relationships built on trust and mutual respect. “We never lose sight of the fact that every penny of association money has come from its members,” Tony explains. “I always ask myself one simple question before making any financial decision: ‘If this was my money, would I be spending it?’”

This dedication to service and impactful results is echoed by Mark Davison of SAEMA: “Since SAEMA started working with SMS the association has moved on greatly introducing new online training services which help fund the activities of the association including further training development and liaison with the National Construction College at Bircham Newton. The services that SMS provide really mean that the Board can focus on the direction of the association and leave the day to day running to the Secretariat, such as organising meetings, locations, events, accounts, keeping the website up to date etc. SMS have also become really embedded in the industry and maintain important industry liaisons with Access Industry Forum, Temporary Works Forum, HSE, CITB and more. Tony, Becky, Duncan and their wider team are a delight to work with! Mark Davison (SAEMA).”

Further reinforcing this sentiment is Rob Harris, Chairman of the FASET Training Committee and FASET Board Member, who states, “FASET has moved on massively since Tony and latterly the rest of the team at Seddon Management Services started running the association. Working seamlessly with the members, they have expanded the areas covered by the association and raised its recognition throughout the sector. Their professionalism shines through and they remain focussed on ensuring the members needs are met and often exceeded. I have no hesitation in commending them as an organisation – the benefits they bring to FASET are huge.”

For those considering a career in association management, Tony offers some sage advice: “Be prepared to work extremely hard! Look at what you can bring to the marketplace and perhaps start with smaller associations to develop your skills. You need to love what you do to make it work.” It’s clear that Tony and the team at SMS embody this philosophy, bringing passion, expertise, and a genuine desire to make a difference to the world of association management. And when Tony isn’t championing safety and best

practices, you might find him indulging his passion for steam engines or enjoying the tranquillity of the Scottish Highlands with his family.