



Ken Newton,
CEO, VASA

The importance of being

VASA is not the only organisation on the planet which was founded by angry people on a mission.

This feisty little group, which has snapped at the heels of government regulators for the past 20 years, was formed out of a perceived need to get the message out that car air conditioning installation and repair is a noble profession which demands some respect.

In its early years, VASA was essentially a lobby group. Behind the scenes, a handful of articulate men began writing letters and conducting studies among their fellow repairers. Their ammunition was knowledge and their targets were poor work practices, fleet contamination and government regulation.

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I arranged a meeting recently between the VASA directors and a board member of the MAC Partners group in Europe. The VASA people hoped to get some good advice about growing the membership and explaining its reason for being to a membership which is growing older and more apathetic. The European guys came to the table with the same agenda, because they too face the same apathy and hoped to learn something from VASA.

Imagine the scene – we had two great organisations sitting at the table wondering where to go from here. One of the VASA directors, trying to throw some light on the apathy trend, remarked that the pressures and needs of the vehicle air conditioning aftermarket were more pressing now than they were when VASA was formed. That being the case, he mused, why aren't technicians queuing up to join both VASA and MAC Partners, and by association, MACS Worldwide?

We used to blame TV for robbing organisations of their audiences. Now we've got a world busting at the seams with technologies and mindless social media designed to distract. Organisations like VASA are struggling to cut through this garbage and promote its urgent relevance to technicians who

are so distracted, they feel the best way is to do nothing. Join nothing.

Just as most of the population has grown distrustful and cynical about its politicians, so too has modern cynicism spread down through those organisations which really do have a reason for being and which deserve to survive.

While VASA and MAC Partners will continue to have a place in automotive history, they will certainly need to reinvent themselves to sell their reasons for being. It won't be easy. One VASA director perhaps summed it up best when he said, "perhaps when they realise that they don't have the knowledge to continue a profitable business, they will see the value in being in a strong, knowledge-based network."

Maybe he's right. In the 20 years I have been associated with VASA, I thought I had a clear vision of its reason for being. But then I was one of the people making the bullets, and to me and those I served, it was easy to justify our existence. But selling this back-room campaigning idea to a technician in a country town is becoming almost impossible. Time for change.

Time for new blood.

Time for me to spend more time with my mistress – a beautiful girl called Helena. She's 24 feet long, made of wood the way boats were intended, with an inboard diesel and fully stocked bar.

I am no more. I am an ex-lobbyist and writer. I haven't yet run out of words, but I have realised that fresh new brainpower is urgently needed to cope with the future. So as my boat sails slowly into the sunset, (which is hard to do from the east coast), I bid farewell to all. I have thoroughly enjoyed my time with VASA and with MACS Worldwide. Goodbye and good luck.

Ken Newton ❁

