

By Jeffrey C. Thomson, CMA



# Local Communities and Market Competition: A Paradox?

IMA® has a unique group of local communities that began in 1920 and is growing stronger and more active today. Its members enrich our association and keep us thriving.

## Dear IMA Member:

An important topic I want to cover in this update is the strength of IMA's local communities in advancing the profession of management accounting globally. I also want to provide some highlights of a recent two-week "U.S. tour" in which I, along with some of IMA's senior volunteers, visited several chapters and councils. All that sounds very "not-for-profit mission-oriented" and altruistic in serving society, but what does it have to do with "market competition," which sounds very "for-profit focused?"

From a market perspective, there is considerable consolidation taking place among accounting associations all over the world. But do larger associations result in a stronger profession with greater value delivered to members? Are members and organizations better enriched as a result? The answer isn't always clear. I can say this: In my nearly 24 years of experience in the cutthroat, competitive telecommunications marketplace, more often than not, absolute size did not

trump agility, service, and community. A similar situation is taking place in the not-for-profit world. It appears that some accounting associations are overlooking their organization's purpose, mission, and values. Instead, they are just "fighting" to increase their numbers. This causes me to take a look at IMA and consider the unique value we deliver to our members.

During my recent travels, I visited four IMA chapters (Chicago, Greater Milwaukee, Minneapolis, and Southwest Florida), attended two formal council events, and visited 10 companies for business development purposes. I was inspired once again by the strength and unwavering passion in our local communities for advancing the profession and for enriching careers and organizational capability. IMA has a growing network of chapters, including 180 in the United States and another 20 around the world. Make no mistake about it: A major competitive advantage for IMA is the power of our community and the unwavering dedication of our volunteer ambassadors. Our focus has never been to become the largest association but to create value for members and become respected and influential globally.

One important way to deliver value is at the local level, where members can meet, get reconnected, share job prospects or best practices, and participate in relevant continuing education opportunities. The "local/global" benefits serve as a strong one-two punch. At the global level, we are financially healthy with three consecutive years of operating surpluses and record numbers of new CMA®s and CMA candidates. While this financial health allows us to offer new benefits as part of membership dues (e.g., IMA Leadership Academy, research, webinars, etc.), our values and "cultural health" will sustain IMA's growth and influence well into the future.

The Minneapolis Chapter, which celebrated its 90th Anniversary, delivers compelling networking and educational events that are affordable, flexible, and relevant. The Chicago Chapter was actually the first IMA chapter chartered back in 1920 and is in the process of being revitalized. The Greater Milwaukee Chapter continues to leverage its strong traditions of service and offering compelling opportunities to network, learn, and grow. And the Southwest Florida Chapter is two years into

*continued on page 61*

## Top Line

*continued from page 8*

its revitalization with a strong business plan to expand its reach, influence, and engagement levels in the region. As I mentioned, in addition to the chapter visits, about 10 corporate visits were arranged in the respective areas to increase awareness about the benefits of IMA and of CMA certification in enriching careers, organizations, economies, and societies.

I was inspired by our local volunteer leaders during all of my visits, and I feel very strongly that NO other association in the world has this competitive strength with a network of 200 chapters across 120 countries.

IMA's local chapters and councils clearly demonstrate the power of community! I hope you appreciate and take advantage of what our local communities can offer.

Sincerely, Jeff Thomson, CMA  
*IMA President and CEO*