What’s the future of a membership association when the industry consolidates? That’s the profound question that I ask myself as I read about a new consolidation in the media ecosystem. The most recent one is the news of AT&T taking on the behemoth Time Warner. You also have Disney and Comcast vying for Fox, and Belden taking on Grass Valley, Miranda, ThinkLogical, and SAM. In every case, these consolidations impact SMPTE. The memberships of multiple companies consolidate into just a single membership.

However, this is not a new phenomenon. Over the course of SMPTE’s 102 years of existence, this sort of churn has surely happened before. Remember when there were film companies and film processing firms all supporting SMPTE? For instance, Kodak during its many decades of success was a core supporter of SMPTE, sponsoring many activities, including an Education Medal Award and donating significant funds to support the SMPTE Foundation, not to mention all the volunteers with a Kodak business card. Kodak has not been a sustaining member of SMPTE for nearly a decade.

With each cycle of consolidation and change resulting from technological revolution, new companies emerge because new opportunities present themselves. These new companies driving the latest technologies determine that SMPTE is the place to congregate and learn and do business. Companies like Grass Valley appeared on the scene as television took off as a viable media outlet for the masses. Today, we see new entrants from the telco industry as media becomes more distributed, using software instead of hardware.

We shouldn’t be too concerned that consolidation is taking place in the media space. As SMPTE survived the changes over the decades, I expect that we will survive this churn as well, but survival can’t happen without the necessary tools and knowledge to propel the society. It is crucial for us to learn more about these new organizations and how they do business and what SMPTE can offer. In recent years, we have received significant support from the “new media” outlets such as Netflix, Amazon, and Google YouTube. These companies see the value that SMPTE brings for technical excellence in standards and education. While I am appreciative of their support and generosity, I realize that we need to do more to keep these and other such outlets attracted to what SMPTE does for the industry. For SMPTE to remain relevant to the industry, we must ensure we are focusing on the right topics and providing the proper resources. What are the technical pain points that SMPTE can solve?

That is why this issue of the Journal—SMPTE’s Annual Progress Report—is so important. If you only read one issue of this Journal (and I hope you read them all!), this should be the one. Among other pertinent industry updates, this issue covers the state of affairs within the very active Standards Community, led by our Standards Vice President, Bruce Devlin. Bruce, along with the legion of volunteers, is busy debating and solving many of the most important technical problems that face our industry. Today, we are investigating new areas where standards may have an impact, such as virtual reality. We are extending our reach into the delivery of professional media over IP networks.

We must ensure that SMPTE is working on the state-of-the-art issues that allow us to navigate this churn as we have done so many times in our 102-year history.