

What's the difference between “PTA” and “PTO Today”?

One common question PTA leaders are asked is, “What’s the difference between PTA and PTO Today?” Below is a list of replies you can give. Item 1 is the most important, so use that if you only have a little time. Use more when speaking or making presentations to interested non-PTA parent or community groups.

1. In a nutshell, PTO Today, which appears to position itself as a national affiliation organization, is a for-profit business that sells information through a magazine and a Web site. Whether or not they pay PTO Today a single dime, non-PTA parent groups are not part of a larger organization.
2. Most state PTAs (though not all) offer automatic not-for-profit and tax exemption to their local units. PTO Today cannot do this. All non-PTA parent groups must apply for this status themselves if they want the benefits of not-for-profit status. The current fee for filing for not-for-profit status with the IRS is \$750.
3. The money that goes to PTA is not money taken away from schools. It is put back into the organization to provide services and resources to members so that they can be more effective at helping their children and schools. PTO Today is a privately owned company with \$2.6 million in revenue in 2004 (*Boston Business Journal*, April 18, 2005). Its owner benefits from the profits from the services his company provides.
4. State PTAs are made up of trained and passionate volunteers who have led local units. They provide personal support to local units and assist with legislative issues, training, tax changes, and many other items that specifically affect PTAs. PTO Today does not have people in the field and provides no such support.
5. PTA is an extremely well-recognized organization that has worked to make significant, positive changes for all children, including school breakfast and lunch programs, nationwide polio vaccinations, and most recently, parent involvement standards in the federal act known as No Child Left Behind. PTO Today isn’t and hasn’t.
6. The portion of dues local PTAs send to state and national PTA is low (only \$1.75 to national and a few dollars to state), but the return on investment is very high. PTO Today claims to be cheap—but you get what you pay for. (See number 7 below.)
7. PTA’s growing list of resources currently includes 18 comprehensive campaigns and programs; 5 national award recognitions; 1 annual convention (and 1 state convention in each state), dozens of print publications, including *Our Children* magazine; a resource-filled Web site; 8 national print and e-newsletters, as well as state newsletters and Web sites; 10 e-learning courses; live workshops; and member discounts at popular retailers. PTO Today offerings are much more limited and narrower in scope.
8. PTA welcomes and works with all people interested in children and education, as well as a wide variety of national, not-for-profit groups and non-PTA parent groups to ensure that each child has a good start in life. PTO Today has no such reach.
9. PTA’s loss of membership—touted by PTO Today as proof PTA doesn’t work—reflects losses across the entire not-for-profit world, as the pace of life and time for volunteering for any organization has decreased for everyone. PTA is nearly 6 million members strong—still a formidable advocate working successfully for children, families, and education.