

How to Attract Gen Y without Losing Everyone Else **ASAE, Marketing Listserve—Marketing Insights, May 2010**

By Adele Lemlek

They are your organization's next generation. But are you doing everything you can to reach them? How to speak so that Generation Y will listen.

It is commonly accepted that retention costs are lower than acquisition. The truth is you need to do both.

As the baby boomers continue to retire and rediscover themselves, we as marketers need to target younger people, including those from Generation Y (also known as millennials) to ensure that our organizations continue to exist and provide meaning and relevance. We need to adjust our marketing efforts and drive change within our organizations to attract this potentially lucrative market. Multi-generational marketing requires multiple messages and value propositions. Does our pricing make sense? Do we need to offer different services?

Know Your Customer

While it is a necessity to attract younger people, you must do so without alienating your existing base to protect your existing revenue. After all, your current members already understand the value proposition. You need to keep them engaged and retain their brand loyalty. But growth within the older generation is limited, so you need to understand the millennials.

Gen Y is different. Millennials are not going to join your organization simply because you are a household name in your industry, or because their parents joined. They are demanding and need to see a clear-cut value to joining in order to spend the time and the money. They need to feel special, welcomed and included. Millennials are tech-savvy and expect immediate responses, preferring texting, tweets and other social media communications over face-to-face, telephone and even e-mail. This generation values its work-life balance and family is extremely important; many millennials choose to spend time with family and friends rather than doing something career-focused such as joining an association.

Most established organizations have services developed to serve their multi-generational members. Do these services and products appeal to everyone, including Gen Y? Which ones are generation-specific? Gen Y will buy from us, by which I mean join our organizations and exhibit brand loyalty, if there is something in it for them.

What to Do

First, we need to determine what our prospective member or customer wants and needs. Then, we will need to create new products and services and even reposition some of our existing products and services for Gen Y. Many companies have successfully done this: look at Cadillac and Coca Cola.

It is possible that what millennials want isn't any different than what our Gen X members, baby boomers and traditionalists want. But if what they want is the same, then why isn't your organization being flooded with Gen Y members?

With feedback from this younger generation, analyze the products and services you offer. Your organization has services and products that they need, but if they aren't buying, you need to look at how you are connecting with this audience. How do you get the word out? Traditional direct mail? Word-of-mouth? Social media? Are your marketing efforts clearly targeting Gen Y? Do you clearly let them know that the service, or product being marketed is tailored for them? How are the benefits packaged? Are the benefits clearly positioned and easy to access? Whatever you do, it is necessary to communicate the value. Do the dues reflect the value? Should you change your pricing?

Make sure when you reposition existing products and services that you clearly label them as being for younger members. It isn't only how you get the word out; it is how you deliver the products and services. This tech-savvy generation likes webcasts, podcasts and virtual tours. Get your IT team involved. You can outsource your webcasting needs to broaden your delivery options and your reach.

The Gen Y Checklist

We tackled this issue at the New York City Bar Association; here's what works:

- **Conduct focus groups.** Bring them in to ask them what they want. What would it take for them to join your organization, or buy from you? What can your organization offer that makes membership attractive? Talk to your existing millennial members to find out why they joined, why they've stayed and if they plan on staying. Ask them if they would recommend membership to their peers and why, or why not?
- **Create something tailored for them.** It can be an e-newsletter, social events, a dedicated section of the website and so on. Give it an identity of its own, but one that is aligned with the organization's brand. Keep in mind that these don't have to be new materials; you can repackage, or repurpose your current services.
- **Use social media.** Create a dedicated Facebook group, LinkedIn group, or blog.
- **Host a welcome event at your association.** Provide information on how they can get the most out of their membership. If your prospects are located throughout the country or state, host virtual receptions and events. Do live webcasts.
- **Create a vehicle where they can participate.** Special committees, or task forces are perfect for this. Be prepared for questioning of authority; this generation isn't shy about asking questions.
- **Hold networking events for them.** Keep in mind that this generation is not as comfortable with face-to-face, so make it fun.
- **Institute a mentoring program.**

We need to make a few adjustments to our organizations. Give up a little control and learn to really listen, react and be flexible. It may be the best thing we can do to ensure the life of our membership associations.

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