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Through our experience we've learned that if you want to do something well, you have to know something about it. We would like to share some of what we have learned with you. Our newsletter is where you'll find marketing and visual communications topics related to retaining, communicating with and growing your organization's

CONFERENCE MARKETING TO YOUNGER MEMBERS

A Field Guide to the Millennials.

They first heard your name briefly mentioned in one of their college classes as a professor listed off some professional resources. Or, maybe their introduction to you was after they landed their first "real" job and received a free membership to your esteemed association from their new employer.

They often confuse their older colleagues with their obsession with technology and desire to text message instead of making a phone call; and at the same time amaze their superiors with their idealistic ways, optimism, high standards and energy.

They are....*drum roll please*....the Millennials.

Chances are you know who they are, and maybe you even had one or two of them living in your house in recent years.

Most associations would love to get these young professionals more involved in their organization. A key to getting them involved and transforming them into life-long members starts with getting them to the annual conference. But, conference marketing strategies that have been effective on previous generations won't work on this bunch. This generation has seen more marketing and advertising message, starting a younger age and in a more universal way than any previous generation. Because they have been flooded with hyped sales pitches, they are numb to traditional marketing and advertising techniques. They surf the web, rarely noticing ads. Direct mail postcards are barely glanced at before hitting the recycling bin. Mass emails are marked as spam. They use DVR to skip over commercials on TV.

Marketers have learned that this may be the toughest crowd to please. Not only are they opposed to mass advertising and marketing, they are difficult to reach because of the increasing number of communication options and media channels.

So, is all hope lost in marketing to them? Does it seem impossible to get younger members to even take notice of the upcoming conference, let alone to get them to register? Don't fret - the basics we reviewed in last month's White Space on the "Dos and Don'ts of Conference Marketing" still apply. We are simply expounding on the idea of personalizing and segmenting your marketing pieces for the groups of recipients.



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Follow Their Lead

Millennials are the early adapters of most social networking sites, meaning not only are they using them, but they have become masters at integrating their online and offline lives through these sites. Actually, Millennials have become so reliant on communicating through technology; they have weak skills at what other generations would consider traditional means of communication.

Need a real life example? Let's take a look at a common real-life event that has been happening for centuries: a wedding. The way Millennials tell their friends and family members about this major life event is a perfect lesson in marketing.

As recent as five years ago, young couples would mail a Save-the-Date postcard, followed by an invitation and RSVP card to friends and family about this major life event. They would also put an announcement in the local paper. But, Millennials are not necessary following these traditions. They know that the chances of someone in this age group keeping up with a "Save the Date" postcard are slim to none, and even less likely is the possibility that their best friend from college will actually fill out the RSVP card and mail it back. Instead they create websites for their weddings complete with e-invitations, a quick way to RSVP, links to online registries, directions, hotel information and a blog from the young couple about the planning which gives attendees an idea of what to expect. And after the wedding is over they post pictures of the reception, honeymoon and even moving into their new house. Friends share YouTube videos and Flickr pictures, and the wedding conversation carries on for months.

Now let's take the lessons we learned from this example and put them to use!

Go To Where They Are

To communicate with Millennials, the best place to start is the social networking sites they are already using every day. Set up accounts, learn the language and start conversations. The good news is that it is free to set up accounts on these sites it only takes the investment of your time to integrate the message of your conference marketing and remind members of important dates.

- **Facebook: Any Millennial is more likely to read details of an event they are invited to over Facebook than they are to read a piece of direct mail before losing it in their apartment.**
- **Twitter and Text Messaging: Forget about phone calls and long-winded email, Millennials like it short and sweet.**
- **LinkedIn: This is a gold mine. LinkedIn is a great way to introduce association members to conference speakers. Start by having key staff members develop profiles.**

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Build Value with User-generated Content

Growing up in a world of e-bay, Wikipedia and blogging has taught Millennials how to develop relationships and build trust without any face-to-face interaction. Take advantage of this to show them that your organization provides quality content and addresses important issues that they need to be aware of. User-generated content can transform you into a respected authority in their eyes.

- **Aggregate blogs, articles and Twitter posts from event speakers onto your website in the months leading up to the event.**
- **Have a Millennial in your organization give weekly video updates about mainstream news related to topics that will be addressed at the conference.**
- **Use a blog or Twitter to let key staff update members on conference planning - be sure to include any decisions that were made to make the event more environmentally friendly, i.e. paperless registration.**

Personalization

Even though Millennials are trained experts at filtering out traditional marketing messages, they are not completely immune. The trick is to approach them creatively. Creating a completely different conference logo and message just for Millennials is not necessary. More important is tailoring the delivery.

- **Personalize direct mailing. Instead of sending Millennials the traditional Save-the-Date postcard, send them an invitation to join in on your online conversation. Point them to your blog, Facebook page and Twitter profile.**
- **Offer younger members a chance to participate in the planning by hosting online polls giving them a chance to vote on social events to be held during the conference.**
- **Show some effort in personalizing the conference for a younger generation by including speakers closer to their age.**
- **To really wow them, set up your own social network that will allow them to create profiles and communicate with you and each other all in one spot. Check our blog for a new post on Ning, an easy-to-use social networking platform.**



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Show that You Care about their Values

Millennials are cause-driven, idealistic and have high community standards. Years from now our history books will talk of the difference they made in our most recent presidential election. Harnessing this energy is a great opportunity to turn Millennials on to your association and annual conference. Find out what is important to them, and incorporate that into the planning, marketing and hosting of the conference.

- **Create an opportunity for members to discuss traveling or lodging together to save money and gas.**
- **Allow younger members to get more involved through event volunteer opportunities.**
- **Make an effort to go green with everything from paperless registration to reusable dinnerware.**
- **It doesn't matter how you do it, but make an effort to show that your association cares about something greater. Collect canned food for a local homeless shelter, raise money for cleaner water in an under-developed country, or connect with a local nonprofit that can organize an optional volunteer activity for attendees during the conference.**

Of course, you have to tell members about these efforts as part of your marketing, preferably over Facebook or Twitter.

Marketers in the entertainment and media industries have already figured out the power of the Millennials and have adapted to their communication preferences. Now, fresh to the workplace, Millennials are already changing the dynamics of office politics, communication and culture – and their impact will continue to grow exponentially over the next few years as they will outnumber both Baby Boomers and Gen-Xers. Any association that services them as professionals must learn how to communicate with them and get them involved in their organization.

You know the value of your annual conference, you know how it can benefit your members – now the challenge is figure out how to tell them. As conference marketing becomes more dynamic, it becomes increasingly vital for associations to develop a solid conference landmark, theme and message. The bigger picture of these tips for marketing to Millennials is that without bridging the gap between strategy and creative, any marketing effort will fall short of its potential.

