

Millennials and Memberships: How Associations Can Communicate, Connect Effectively with the Younger Generation

At 56 million strong, millennials represent the largest segment of our workforce, outnumbering both the baby boomers and gen Xers. Though millennials form a massive number of those in the workforce, they make up less than one percent of association memberships. That is a shocking statistic considering the benefits of association membership, which include increased learning opportunities, industry advocacy, a wealth of resources and a connection to a like-minded community. Most would think millennials – the majority of whom still have decades to advance in their careers – want access to those benefits.



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Associations have always embraced a multigenerational communication strategy. The difference now is how the majority of the workforce communicates. Communication teams that run an outdated communication strategy on old technology risk alienating members by not optimizing their engagement with current members or attracting new members.



Multigenerational communication strategies that can engage both current and future members often put old communication strategy and technology to the test. Associations that do not leverage multiple platforms and customize their engagement for millennials risk becoming irrelevant. The urgency for communication teams to upgrade their approach compounds every year, as current members retire and their replacements are not joining.

The goal of engaging millennials is something traditional publishing organizations have been confronted with for years. This need to attract millennials created a flurry of new tools and methods. Publishers continually invest in research and tools to understand how millennials find and absorb content. Publishers seeing the most success use this research to develop intentional strategies for creating new, sustainable paths to engage millennial members, leveraging new technology and data. We will explore four changes taking place and how organizations are actively implementing strategies to stay ahead of the curve.

Who Are Millennials

First, we need to understand our audience. Millennials are a combination of Generations Y and Z. Generation Y represents the generation

born between 1981 and 1991, while Generation Z is 1991 and 2001. These generations grew up in a time when communication was evolving from traditional print to online, and internet access was shifting from dial up to Wi-Fi. The older millennials were coming of age as cell phones were shrinking and becoming devices on which to text and snap a photo rather than make a call. Younger millennials have grown up with smartphones. Both consume content online at breakneck paces.

Millennials' expectations for their experience with an organization and the speed in which this experience takes place are drastically different than their predecessors'. Their expectations are transforming and altering communication as we know it. They evolved digital conversation by introducing shorthand, such as emoticons, to utilizing instant communication technology like text.



Millennials also hold different values: they are issues-oriented and not loyal to brands or organizations unless they align with their principles. They look for organizations that value communities where the culture encourages a sense of belonging, where solutions to problems are pursued. Millennials are also used to being busy and having their attention pulled in many directions. Because most are now well into adulthood, they have careers and families to focus on. That means that when they do engage in content, it is meaningful and interaction is efficient.

With the changes in communication comes a different means of finding and engaging in content. Let us look at some of those changes.

Short Attention Span

Content producers typically have about eight seconds to relay their message to millennials, according to Social Factor. That short attention span could be produced through content shock, Mark Schaefer writes. It occurs when the exponentially increasing volumes of content are put in front of people who have a limited human capacity to consume it. Content shock is surreptitiously training millennials and younger generations to become numb to content. They are digesting an unprecedented amount of content, but they are not given the time to consciously absorb and evaluate it. The average millennial is used to being fed easily digestible information quickly.

Consider this: Every minute...

- ⌚ 500 hours of YouTube videos are posted
- 💬 29 million WhatsApp messages are sent
- ✉️ 148,000 emails are written
- 🌐 1,440 WordPress posts go live
- 🐦 448,000 tweets are tweeted
- 📷 65,927 Instagram photos are uploaded
- 🔍 3.8 million searches are conducted on Google
- 🌐 3.3 million Facebook posts are made

The Solution

Quantity is not better than quality. Content producers compete for people's time and attention in a world where content is often delivered to the user through a notification on their phone, email or streaming device. They need to give readers compelling information in an efficient, engaging format.

The Solution

“Quantity is not better than quality.”

Organizations such as BuzzFeed and InLoop have spent countless hours testing and



studying the best way to deliver information to this generation.

The Buzzfeed site incorporates alternative formats to present real journalism. Using colloquial language, they pair the information millennials need to know with the information they want to know. Articles are formatted as lists or visuals are integrated throughout text with truncated paragraphs and attention-grabbing headlines.

However, organizations such as InLoop realize associations do not produce content at the rate Buzzfeed does. Instead, they leverage automated newsfeeds that pull content from relevant sources throughout the day, giving associations relevant content any time members visit the website. This provides a visually appealing and personalized experience every time.

Consumption of this style of communication is being adopted by the other generations as well. As we see traditional media formats and content being replaced by intentional formats and a variety of visuals, content is reaching further across a variety of platforms. Readers are scrolling through digital articles longer, interacting more and sharing content.

Getting Personal

The use of artificial intelligence — or using technology to allow computer systems to learn from and mimic human behavior — is on the rise. Organizations such as Netflix, Amazon, Facebook, Spotify and others continually deploy AI-related solutions that directly guide and learn from consumers every day. **These organizations have created a new expectation for one-to-one personalization.**

While the application of AI to create a personalized experience for users is not a new concept, advancements in technology have increased its accessibility to the market. The amount of data organizations collect is far too much for any human to sort through. Nor is it possible for a person to create a personalized experience for all their clients. AI's role is to consume the ongoing stream of data, learn consumer preferences, create individualized use and showcase the pertinent content.

The Solution

Remember what we said about millennials being busy but wanting to engage in meaningful content? AI technology provides marketers a one-to-one solution for content. With each engagement, the user is making their next experience better because AI technology tracks what they are interested in. This experience is also drifting to the consumption of professional news. People tend to engage more if the content is tailored to their interests and habits.

We know that members join an association for a variety of reasons, whether to gain a sense of community, learn more or advocate for their industry. To communicate effectively and meet members' needs, content needs to be tailored to their personal goals. AI technology is the best way to provide that tailored content without an association staff member having to sift through mountains of data.

Additionally, organizations that package their content and provide it to members on a regular schedule see the most interaction. In fact, Oren Ahronson, CEO of InLoop, shared with us that association members that personalized their

emails have an increase of 62% in open rate. Instead of sending an overwhelming amount of newsletters, registration links and membership renewal emails on various days, InLoop uses AI to find relevant content from association blogs, member benefit information, webinars and conference details. Because of an AI powered approach, busy millennials can expect interesting and engaging content in one place, making them more likely to engage.

Social Power

Millennials have an inherent distrust of brands and traditional advertising, necessitating that content producers use of a variety of platforms to reach them. The first step in mastering social media is creating a consistent presence. Tools such as Hootsuite, SocialPilot, Sendible, InLoop and Buffer give organizations a streamlined service to do this across the social channels. All these platforms provide the opportunity to take your social strategy to the next level. To be successful, organizations must also learn how millennials engage with social media for information and feedback. This generation tends to believe what their peers say. They seek peers' opinions and often search for their validation as well.

"Few traditional publishers are seeing traction with millennials."

However, according to McKinsey, a small number of influencers are accountable for the lion's share of referrals via social media. According to entrepreneur Andrew Molz, brands should focus on earning those referrals and recommendations to reach millennials. Gartner Research shows that 84 percent of millennials are likely to be influenced to make a purchase based upon user-generated content that is created by strangers. While influencers and peers may hold the most influence over millennials, organizations can impress millennials through engagement rather than promotion. About 62 percent of this group states that they are more likely to become brand loyal if a company engages with them sincerely on social media.

The Solution

Millennials want authentic interactions to get them thinking and engaged, not more content to scroll through on newsfeeds. Social media is just another platform on which consumers can have a conversation and disseminate information. That means quality content is still a must in order to draw in millennials' attention. They will then talk about that content on social media, rather than face to face. This means marketers and producers need to keep up with social channels to spread awareness about whatever product they have created and are marketing. The content should be as unique and engaging as possible.

Nontraditional media

Over two-thirds of millennials read the news daily, but they are discriminating consumers whose content habits vary depending on the topic. They gravitate toward niche publications and communities versus traditional media outlets. Few traditional publishers are seeing traction with millennials. Only the New York Times and the New Yorker appear in the list of top news sites for millennials.

Outside of social media, sites such as BuzzFeed, Vice, UpWorthy, Complex and Elite Daily have captured the millennial audience. Traditional media continue to serve a substantial portion of the population, but they are being replaced by narrowcasting — slicing audiences into smaller and smaller pieces. With social media sites overtaking TV as a source for news for young people, news organizations have become increasingly reliant on social media platforms to generate traffic. A report by Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism described how a "second wave of disruption" had hit news organizations, with publishers such as The Economist having to employ large social media teams to optimize their posts.

The Solution

Millennials are not loyal to a business or organization just because they may have brand awareness. The generation is issues-oriented, and they want to know that an organization they devote time and money to is aligned with their interests. They could also give millennials

the impression that they are authentic content producers worthy of their time. Communicators should use nontraditional platforms and mediums to maintain a consistent message to consumers about their organization's mission.

The best solution is to incorporate nontraditional publications. Because of narrowcasting, some of the most viewed and influential information is not coming from traditional publishers. This is pushing communication teams to research far past traditional publications and trade journals to find the influencers. Organizations such as Meltwater, InLoop and others provide content services that aggregate information from leading publications to grassroots blog posts. The service gives communication teams the ability to stay on top of the industry news and their members' interests.

Communicate Effectively

As we know, millennials are a unique group that is changing the professional landscape and digital world. To communicate effectively, content needs to grab their attention through unique and authentic platforms and messaging that aligns with issues about which individuals already care. Associations will see this membership demographic grow if they can communicate with millennials effectively and allow them to see that associations are another group in which to build community, learn from and have an authentic experience.

Data will be one of marketers' and communicators' biggest assets as well. Associations must have superior analytics to measure audience interest in real time. They will be able to see which topics are or are not driving interest so they can adjust to keep an audience engaged. With these tactics, you can watch your membership grow as millennials find new value in associations.





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