

STRAIGHT ADVICE FOR ASSOCIATIONS

HOW TO ^{actually} GET UNDER-30s TO JOIN



The Perks of Association Membership for Young Professionals



Association Event Ideas for Young Professionals



Successfully Building a Young Professional Member Base

The Perks of Association Membership for Young Professionals

For young professionals, association membership matters. A lot.

Today's organizations are innovative, technologically savvy, and offer an incomparable list of benefits.



Resume Diversity

Associations offer members the opportunity to include substantive elements in their resumes. Leadership roles, industry awards, and committee volunteerism are all examples of experience that help build professional credibility.



Exclusive Information

Members have the ability to quickly access data such as legislative policy updates, original research, innovative trends, industry predictions, articles from thought leaders, proprietary content, seminars, newsletters, and best practices.



Job Searches

Many associations provide access to job opportunities. Online job boards, career centers, job fairs, and exclusive openings are common benefits.



Benefits & Discounts

Members often qualify for benefits and discounts. These may include savings on products and services, group health care, travel discounts, and access to mentoring programs, young professional groups, exclusive conferences, trade shows, and events.



Training & Education

Education paves the road to success in any industry. Associations host workshops, online training, peer-to-peer learning, etc. designed to help members to develop professionally.



Strength in Numbers

Associations provide the benefits of political clout without the pressure. They work tirelessly to influence legislation by shaping policy and regulation decisions, swaying public opinion, and lobbying, all in an effort to further the goals and ideals of the industry they represent.



Giving Back

Associations provide endless opportunities for volunteerism on all levels. Whether it's participating within the association itself or helping out other charitable organizations, members can easily find ways to give back.



Networking

Members make meaningful connections through associations. There are LinkedIn groups, private online association networks, exclusive access to membership directories, exposure to thought leaders and influencers, and endless programs and events.



Certifications & Designations

Whether required or optional, association-provided certifications and designations offer ongoing opportunities for professional development and a diversified skill set.



Best Practices

Industry best practices require complying with industry updates, adhering to ethical standards, and working to improve the industry as a whole. Associations ensure their members meet (or exceed) the requirements in order to protect the reputation of the industry as a whole.



Reputation Building

Associations help members create a name for themselves. Membership builds credibility, indicates a commitment to the field, signals a commitment to professional and ethical standards, and assures knowledge of industry trends and developments.



Leadership Skills

Members can participate in programs that help them with the steps to become a recognized industry leader. From the smallest engagement (answering questions in an online forum) to major participation (speaking at an event), taking advantage of any opportunity helps with professional development.

association event ideas

FOR

YOUNG PROFESSIONALS

Our recent industry survey revealed a number of trends impacting the association industry. Results showed that **regardless of size, budget, or mission, most associations are struggling to come up with ideas to engage 20-somethings.**

While there is not a singular answer to the challenge, even the simplest of ideas are worth trying, right?

8 FUN IDEAS FOR 20-SOMETHINGS:

- ① Group dinner featuring local breweries
- ② Personal growth seminar using Clifton Strengths-Finder program
- ③ Poker Tournament with play money but real prizes
 - ④ Sky-diving simulator
 - ⑤ Bingo – cheesy but fun
- ⑥ Virtual horse racing or home run derby
- ⑦ Performance bartending (Google it)
- ⑧ Giant “Operation” or “Light Bright” games

Tip: It's important to view engagement activities for young professionals as an investment, not a revenue generator. Consider your **best possible scenario to be a break-even**, and you'll be on the right track.



The Customer Wants What the Customer Wants:

How Associations Can Successfully Build a Young Professional Member Base

Regardless of its mission or structure, an association's day-to-day operations essentially mirror that of a service-based business. Businesses have customers. Associations have members. Why do customers seek goods and services? To solve a problem. Why do members engage with an organization? To solve a problem.

Consider the "member as the customer" angle as it relates to younger members. With the influx of Millennials and Generation Z into the workforce, it's time for associations to accept that a new type of "customer" has emerged and they're here to stay.

A Google search for "what millennials want" produces thousands of results focused on this generation's expectations of employers, restaurants, banks, hotels, cars, etc. The takeaway? They're not willing to adapt to business, so businesses must adapt to them.

Perhaps the most succinct and profound search result was a LinkedIn article about the evolution of athletic footwear marketing. No, associations aren't shoe companies, but both are facing the same challenge: how to resonate with the younger generation.

"The Millennial generation isn't interested in the pressure and expectations associated with professional sports," posted Brent James of Concept 21, a footwear industry leader. "They have seen through the advertising and the hype, realizing that they are merely being sold a false dream. This is why new demand for a more relatable brand is being filled by smaller companies... millennials want a

brand that motivates, guides and connects them through experiences."

What business is designed, at its very core, to motivate, guide and provide experiences? Associations.

Associations have the resources to provide young professionals exactly what they want (the "business" has what the "customer" needs). The key is to have a plan to make those resources widely available and ensure your target demographic is aware of them.

The good news is your plan is already in action. You've established a goal (recruit and engage younger members) and pinpointed what you need to provide to achieve that goal: Motivation, Guidance, and Experiences.

NEXT STEPS:

Convene a team: Identify key players. Input and perspective from a variety of sources is ideal - consider including the board, staff, members, and non-members.

Assess: Convene the group to establish a focus on what young professionals are looking for from an association. Set a formal objective (e.g., increase young membership recruitments by 10%).

Analyze: As a group, identify links between what they want and what your organization offers, or could offer (e.g., online education, mentoring, chat groups, etc.). Don't overthink it; nothing is too absurd. The more ideas, the better - the group is less likely to dial in on one idea too soon. Working

through this step with the “wants” (motivation, guidance, and experiences) top of mind will help with the next step.

Inc.com suggests creating an “idea resume” to put ideas into action: “An idea resume is a one-page document listing the following attributes: how customers will learn about it or access it; what resources or processes are needed to make it a reality; and how the solution will achieve the objective.”

“The benefit of idea resumes is that (when they're finished) they allow all involved parties to scan and share ideas in a way that invites “apples-to-apples” comparisons and “ensures that ideas are evaluated on their merits rather than on how well they are pitched.”

At this point, determine the feasibility of ideas and decide/recommend concepts, then narrow down the selection to those that are most promising.

Create a concept map: Establish a basic road map for transforming the ideas into components of a program. It doesn't need to be complicated, but be sure to keep a laser-tight focus from beginning to end. The map can be updated in perpetuity, but a visual representation of the plan is helpful for everyone to stay on target.

Create an action plan: Plan the implementation of your new and improved program/process for recruiting and retaining younger members. The action plan builds on the concept map and should consist of the tasks required for each step of the launch. Whether it's lining up education courses, planning a mentorship program, putting together a networking event, there should be tasks for each.

Launch: Using the action plan, kick off your new and improved program. Monitoring and managing are key aspects to keeping things on target. This cannot be overemphasized – monitoring and mentoring will make or break your program.

Evaluate: This should be ongoing. Are you on track to reach the goal? Where can the process be improved? Ask for frank feedback on what's working and what can be improved or should be pushed to the side. Regardless of the results of the evaluation, associations should go back through earlier steps to rework or fine tune. No program is perfect, and all programs are in a state of constant evolution. The key to making it work is to be willing to adjust the sails as you navigate the waters.

Competition for members is fierce and meeting the demands of this young demographic is critical to survival. To stay credible and relevant, associations must provide what they want.

In her book, “Save the Associations,” Sarah Sladek of XYZ University shares a quote from Mary Detloff of the Minnesota Society of Professional Engineers, “Now people are interested in an association more so because of what it can do for them, not what they can do for the association or the profession.”

This generation isn't going away. Whether or not associations are going away depends on their willingness to adapt to 20- and 30-somethings. The sky's the limit, so try something new. **What have you got to lose?** 🌟