# Young Members 2.0: Deepening Relationships

Creating a Connection with Young Members

## Instagram. Snapchat. What's App. Facebook. Email. Events. Private communities.

There have never been more ways to engage members but as quickly as the number of options available to organizations evolves, so too are the constituent audiences that nonprofits look to engage.

Connection, per social science, generally refers to the feeling that you belong to a group and feel close to other people. Scientific evidence strongly suggests that this is a core psychological need, essential to feeling satisfied with your life. In the context of membership, connection can include the act of networking or interacting with other people to exchange information and develop contacts, especially to further one's career. Or it can be more personal, a connection that includes a relationship in which a person, thing or idea is linked or associated with something bigger or more emotionally meaningful.

# How are Young Members Connecting?

Well-known and well-documented, Millennials, those born between 1981 and 1996, brought to their early days of membership shifting ideas around work and engagement alongside a seismic shift in communication preferences. As a group, Millennials prioritized work aligned with their personal values over loyalty to an employer[1] and sought flexible, collaborative work environments[2]. Associations responded by embracing new channels, introducing targeted programs and becoming adept storytellers that aligned their brand with a greater sense of purpose.

The emerging Generation Z has begun their ascent into membership with a notably different perspective. With vast amounts of information at their disposal, Gen Z is more pragmatic and analytical about their decisions than members of previous generations. With early exposure to the financial tumult of the 2008 financial crisis, job security is top of mind for those in

Generation Z, with recent data suggesting 70% prioritize stability and security in a job over lots of passion and flexibility[3]. They are more likely to indicate a preference for a traditional brick-and-mortar workplace as opposed to working remotely[4]. Gen Z is radically inclusive, showing greater freedom of expression and openness to understanding different kinds of people.

## Professional Connections to Fuel Success

Connection not only supports personal well-being, but provides young members with social capital, an important currency in an increasingly networked business environment. By connecting and establishing trust with industry leaders and colleagues you can help each other reach professional goals. For Millennials and Gen Z, many of whom look to their membership to support career growth, professional organizations provide immediate access to a congregation of intelligent, like-minded peers immersed in the inner workings of the industry and access to a variety of opinions and ideas.

More established in their careers, Millennials have proven especially adept at using a multitude of social media platforms to their benefit and provide tremendous value in understanding how young members connect professionally. Whether it's job hunting, connecting with colleagues or seeking advice, Millennials overwhelmingly believe that today's professional communities are a powerful tool to build social currency and further their professional goals[5].

But Millennials aren't just connecting digitally. They also seek opportunities to participate in interactive workshops, panels and networking opportunities that can't be duplicated online. In-person events act as a forum to make higher quality connections with people that share the same interest. While their perspective and preferences with regards to work may differ, Gen Z pursues professional connection for the same reasons.
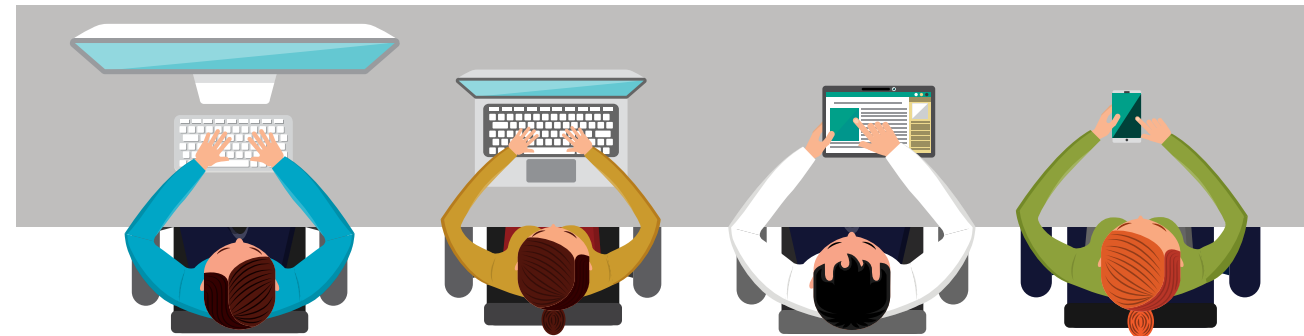
# Connecting with Young Members

Before we all started carrying computers in our pockets, one of the only opportunities for connection was in person. Being "connected" in today's world is a much more complicated concept. As associations look to maintain relevance and deliver value to young members, understanding and optimizing the ways in which we connect to Millennials and Gen Z is critical.

## The (new) old fashioned way?

Think connecting with young members is all about digital? Think again.

One third of young members report receiving phone calls from their association and another third (34%) reporting they frequently receive text messages. Yet a larger percentage of young members report phone calls work, with 78 percent of all members saying phone calls are either somewhat or very effective in engaging them. And almost half of Generation Z found these phone calls very effective. Despite having grown up surrounded by screen and social media, the emerging Generation Z has shown a preference for the transparency and value of an in-person, 1:1 relationship. Additionally:

- Mounting research suggests digital interaction may be linked to health issues including anxiety and depression.

- Increasingly targeted advertising and location tracking has created privacy concerns among many.

- Gartner recently reported the first ever global decline in smartphone sales[6].

Digital communication isn't going anywhere but the value of the personal communication afforded via a simple phone call may prove a powerful option for many associations looking to demonstrate value and create connections.

This is also true of events. Our Young Members 2.0 study found one-on-one conversations with real people matter and remain essential in demonstrating value and creating a meaningful experience. When asked how important it was that an association facilitates connections with authentic people who understand their unique needs within the initial part of their journey, 94 percent of young members identified this as important, with almost two thirds suggesting it's very important.

But what kind of events are young members turning to in order to make connections with their peers?

## Event Participation Among Young Members

| | ALL YOUNG MEMBERS | MILLENNIALS | GENERATION Z |
|---|---|---|---|
| Workshop or training | 48% | 49% | 44% |
| A fun run or race | 21% | 21% | 22% |
| A gala or party | 31% | 35% | 23% |
| A community service event | 26% | 25% | 29% |
| An auction | 12% | 14% | 10% |
| A networking event | 30% | 29% | 31% |
| Telethon or concert | 10% | 10% | 8% |
| Golf or sporting tournament | 7% | 9% | 2% |
| An annual conference | 15% | 15% | 15% |

It's notable that only 15 percent of young members reported they had participated in an annual conference. If these numbers look familiar, boost young member participation by ensuring programming provides value with workshops featuring practical information that can be immediately applied in their careers. Call them to sustain the connections formed at your annual event by leveraging the effectiveness of phone calls to create a personal connection and leaning into digital tools to deepen the relationship. Convergence of the in-person and digital might be the top conference item needed to attract Millennial and Generation Z attendees and can lead to the breakthroughs that attendees are seeking.

**Only 15% of young members reported they participated in an annual conference.**

# Connecting Online

With the high level of mobilization across both groups, young members don't necessarily distinguish between contacts they meet online and those they connect to in the physical world. They continually flow between communities that promote their causes and value online communities because they allow people of different backgrounds to connect and mobilize around causes and interests.

Email is helpful in ensuring young members stay up-to-date on what's going on with your organization. Almost three-quarters of young members report receiving email from their association often, either in the form of a newsletter (72%) or a more personalized message (73%) and both are effective in keeping young members informed and up-to-date.

Yet the majority continue to form, and sustain, connections with their organization and with others via social media and online community. Organizations have made strong strides in reaching out to young members via channels like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram:

| | FREQUENCY | EFFECTIVENESS |
|---|---|---|
| | Percentage saying their association reaches them often via this channel | Percentage reporting this channel is effective in keeping them informed |
| Facebook | 58% | 80% |
| Twitter | 40% | 74% |
| Instagram | 46% | 76% |
| Snapchat | 35% | 68% |
| LinkedIn | 37% | 74% |

Instagram ranked a surprising second, with almost half of young members reporting they use it to keep up with their association and over three-quarters saying it's an effective way to stay in touch. The growing popularity of Instagram may be rooted in the importance of influencer marketing with Millennials and Generation Z. Too, Instagram presents multiple modes of engagement with opportunities to share images via the main feed and tell more of a narrative via Instagram stories.

Although published data has noted shifts in the number of users engaging with Facebook, its flexibility to share and promote a variety of content types make it the top social media channel in terms of outreach. But in terms of building connections and fostering relationships, Facebook's long-term effectiveness with young members remains to be seen.

According to a recently published study from the Pew Research Center[7], just 51% of US individuals age 13 to 17 say they use Facebook, a dramatic plunge from the 71% who reported using the social network in Pew's previous study, fielded in 2015[8]. Usage among teens in homes whose annual family income is $75,000 or more – often a target demographic for organizations looking to leverage Facebook groups to amplify fundraising efforts - is even lower at just 36%. The study from Pew Research Center is not the first to suggest younger audiences are leaving Facebook. A February 2018 study from eMarketer[9] estimated Facebook's user base in this key demographic declined by 9.9% in 2017. The study goes on to predict Facebook will lose an additional 2.1 million American users under the age of 25 this year.

**Almost half of young members use Instagram to keep up with their association.**

**The number of US individuals age 13-17 using Facebook dropped 20% between 2015 and 2018.**

Social media remains an important channel for building awareness and a cost-effective way to reach thousands of current members. But when it comes to building connections, social media sites like Facebook can come up short. Facebook:

- Focuses on socially- or conversationally-enabled content (not conversation)

- Relies on a loose network with a hub-and-spoke model of interaction between an audience and the content creator, or person sharing the content.

- Dynamic, broad ranging conversations are facilitated only through a comment or response transaction.

Think about your own Facebook account. You comment and respond on people's posts, but they aren't a dialogue in that they're one-way. And this behavior may extend to the pages you follow or groups you belong to. A nonprofit may share an update on a program – you like the post and may respond with kind words, but there's no dialogue. You may like a photo from an organization's recent event, but you don't expect a reply. In this regard, social media often serves as a communal monologue where everyone is communicating but not necessarily with one another. Just because people are connected in a shared network doesn't mean they share a true connection, a relationship that will deepen a young members commitment to your organization.

Online communities can help address the deficiencies of social media, allowing young members and/or donors tightly to connect because they depend on the organization or hold a shared belief in a cause. A thriving community usually has many topics of conversation, creating connections between young members who are active participants and those lurkers who hold the community together.

# Deepening Relationships

**Ideas to help create connection among young members**

Phone calls offer a cost-effective, high-impact way to create and sustain connection with – and among – young members. Remember, only one third of young members report receiving phone calls from their association yet a larger percentage of young members report phone calls work, with 78 percent of all members saying phone calls are either somewhat or very effective in engaging them. Call to ask them how things are going and what you can do to improve or to share your own experience.

Extend the value of events. Leverage a strong follow-up process, with testimonials from members who look and sound like them, to foster a strong connection with your organization. Create working groups in private communities to keep learning fresh.

Ensure you're creating opportunities for young members to find and connect with one another regardless of the channel. Use email and social media to drive awareness and to direct young members to your website, events and community where where they can share, learn and build 1:1 relationships.

# Wrapping Up

Research from the commercial sector tells us that, on a lifetime value basis, emotionally connected customers are more than twice as valuable because they are highly satisfied. They buy more, show less price sensitivity, pay closer attention to your communications, follow your advice, and recommend you more – everything you hope their experience with you will cause them to do. Young people have always embodied the zeitgeist of their societies. Technology has given young members unprecedented connectivity among themselves and with the rest of the population.

Nonprofits leveraging the same sort of emotional, connection-based strategies to design, prioritize and measure the experience for the rapidly growing population of young members can not only generate greater value, but in every interaction they become more and more convinced that "this organization gets me." They stay connected to you, and to each other.

# About Personify

Personify is the market-leading Constituent Management and Engagement (CME) platform that empowers nonprofit organizations to better engage their constituents, maximize revenue and optimize operations. For over 20 years, Personify has served as the technology foundation for organizations of all sizes from the largest associations, charities, YMCAs and JCCs to emerging nonprofits. Nearly 25 percent of the U.S. population interacts with Personify through their involvement in nonprofit organizations. For additional information, visit www.personifycorp.com.

# References

[1] The 2016 Deloitte Millennial Survey; Winning Over the Next Generation of Leaders.
https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/global/Documents/About-Deloitte/gx-millenial-survey-2016-exec-summary.pdf

[2] Forbes, "What Millennials Want In The Workplace (And Why You Should Start Giving It To Them)." Jan. 3, 2014.
https://www.forbes.com/sites/robasghar/2014/01/13/what-millennials-want-in-the-workplace-and-why-you-should-start-giving-it-to-them/#30ea55414c40

[3] Adecco, "Generation Z vs. Millennials." 2015. http://pages.adeccousa.com/rs/107-IXF-539/images/generation-z-vs-millennials.pdf

[4] Marketwatch, "Remote Workers are Not Watching Daytime TV in Their Pajamas," March 21, 2017.
https://www.marketwatch.com/story/remote-workers-are-not-watching-daytime-tv-in-their-pajamas-2017-03-21

[5] Entrepreneur, "Millennials Have Rediscovered the Benefits of Joining a Professional Organization." June 5, 2015. https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/246691

[6] TechCrunch, "Gartner reports first ever global decline in smartphone sales." February 22, 2018.
https://techcrunch.com/2018/02/22/gartner-reports-first-ever-global-decline-in-smartphone-sales/

[7] Pew Research Center, "Teens, Social Media & Technology 2018." May 31, 2018. http://www.pewinternet.org/2018/05/31/teens-social-media-technology-2018/

# References (cont.)

[8]  Pew Research Center, "Teens, Social Media & Technology Overview 2015." April 9, 2015.
http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/04/09/teens-social-media-technology-2015/

[9]  eMarketer, "Facebook Losing Younger Users (But not all are migrating to Instagram)." February 12, 2018.
https://www.emarketer.com/content/facebook-losing-younger-users-at-even-faster-pace

# Ready to learn more?

**Request a Demo**

**Personify**

personifycorp.com