

How to Appeal to the Next Generation

With Millennials entering the market and baby boomers exiting, it is more and more crucial for scientific associations to involve young physicians and facilitate an easy handover. Associations have to think about younger generations increasingly and to take action in a way that will deliver value to them. Association congresses are, for example, a great time to promote it.

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But the increasing of the membership of young professionals is not enough, and should not be considered as an objective in itself. The challenge for associations is to engage the young generations as an active part of the association's life, giving them direct responsibilities, creating volunteer opportunities, speaking their languages and answering their specific needs.

There are multiple ways of engaging the new generation, here are some best practices, taken from recent events.

The first example involves young physicians at the highest level, where decisions are made. For instance, you can create a "parallel young board" alongside the executive board, with a representative in the executive board and

supporting the congress organisation with a focus on the needs of the younger generation.

SOCIAL AMBASSADORS & COMMUNICATION MULTIPLIERS

Millennials were born with smartphones in their hands, so you can attract them if you are on social media and communicate with them consistently, with stories preferably. It is a great way for you to explain, for instance, why the association can be useful for their professional development.

Young delegates, in addition, can be involved as social ambassadors and contribute throughout the congress to post and share content and videos on social media. The young social media ambassadors can play a

key role when it comes to finding the right action to engage younger generations... because they are perceived as spontaneous, trustworthy and eager to share their personal experience. The ambassadors do not use a standardised language, but they speak about an activity or event they attended, filtered by their own experience, adding a more tangible feature to the 'content' that is produced this way.

Also, the young professionals, who play the role of volunteer ambassadors during congresses or other initiatives, will consider the association as a body that takes them into consideration, thus develop a stronger sense of belonging and will easily become ambassadors of the association itself.

DEDICATED SESSIONS AND NETWORKING

Meeting people, exchanging ideas, sharing opinions are always on top of the positive experiences people take home after a conference. Yes, it is important for everyone, but those who are younger are not always aware of that and they go to a conference or follow the association's activities mainly to develop their own knowledge. That is, of course, one of the key objectives of the association, but networking is also important, and young delegates sometimes need help to network.

Dedicated sessions like speed-dating between young delegates and industry leaders, for example, are a powerful way to establish fruitful contacts. Or, since young physicians have their own specific needs and experiences to share, it is also useful to organise dedicated sessions for this age group. You can organise a "Young Evening" or provide dedicated masterclasses or practical courses where a senior expert is available to openly interact with a small group of young attendees. Or you can arrange parallel meetings giving the opportunity to have 15-minute informal chats with senior doctors in a lounge area for instance.

GO TECH & INSPIRING SPACES

Young members are used to having access to content 24/7 from all devices and they love experiencing new technology. It is important to provide the association or congress website and app with rich content and features, easily-downloadable PowerPoint presentations, the ability to interact with senior members and speakers, etc. so they can share ideas, network online and give personal feedback. Also, new learning formats which include virtual reality, hybrid technology, wearable devices, robots, AI or bluetooth can help catch the younger delegates' attention.

Meanwhile, rigid settings, with traditional top table and lectern and speakers presenting at a distance from the audience, are not appreciated by the younger delegates who

dislike hierarchy and prefer to participate and collaborate freely. Unusual locations or settings such as round rooms, collaborative bar-camps, equipped spaces for self-organised meetups and work groups and lounges to play and relax in can facilitate engagement.

Another effective way to give visibility to young doctors is to recognise their research. Special Award categories for the under 40s or under 35s can be developed to recognise outstanding presentations or abstracts. You can also create a contest to select the most talented young professionals and give them the opportunity to take part in the association's annual meeting through a full sponsorship. This will give them great motivation and a sense of positive competition.

It is also important to liaise with schools, universities and institutions of higher education to set up so-called Awareness Days or Education Weeks dedicated to a specific topic or more playful activities like simulations, hands-on sessions and hackathons to activate powerful learning. This will help the association penetrate into the education path of this generation even before they get their first job in the industry.

Each association must find the best initiatives to engage and attract young participants. If successful, associations will nurture the engagement of the new generations who will, in turn, guarantee the success of the organisations in the future.

This article was provided by the International Association of Professional Congress Organisers, author Patrizia Semprebene Buongiorno, Vice President, AIM Group International. IAPCO represents today 133 companies comprised of over 9,100 professional congress organisers, meeting planners and managers of international and national congresses, conventions and special events from 40 countries.
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