

Overcome Cognitive Biases to Improve Young Member Engagement



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Member engagement is a top challenge for associations, and new generations of joiners have shifting preferences and habits. To successfully reach these members, associations must overcome their biases and find new ways to engage.

Would you like to increase your member renewal and retention rates? While many associations maintain consistent year-over-year growth and renewal, **some organizations are struggling to keep up**.

According to Marketing General Incorporated's **2019 Membership Marketing Benchmarking Report**, 47 percent of associations saw no change in their renewal rate in the last year. However, 24 percent reported that renewals declined.

What's the reason for this? There may be shifting mindsets and attitudes within young professionals about joining associations. These members, largely Gen Z and millennials, also require new strategies for member engagement if they're going to remain as members.

Too often associations rely on tried-and-true member engagement tactics, which may result in judgment errors—what neuroscience and behavioral economics call cognitive bias.

An example of this is the **false consensus effect**, which causes organizations to assume that people are more similar to us than they are. Thus, association leaders replace an accurate understanding of new and younger members with memories of themselves as new members.



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Another error, known as **overconfidence bias**, causes association leaders to be excessively confident about what new members want. They don't take the time to find out what actually inspires new members to join, and therefore, don't know how to serve them.

For instance, many associations rely on conferences and meetings as a means of engaging members. Yet, research shows that millennials are **significantly more introverted** than previous generations.

Young members have also grown up as digital natives and live in a world characterized by technology to meet and stay connected. As a result, they might naturally have a decreased need for face-to-face interactions, which means associations may have to rethink their engagement strategies.

More Online Engagement

Young members also have a corresponding need for increased online engagement. Many associations might fail to provide enough digital space for these members to use, beyond an association's online member community or portal.

For instance, if your association doesn't have a Facebook or LinkedIn group, you could be missing opportunities to engage. Such online groups are easy to set up and manage and could serve as another **critical space** for professional engagement that feels safe and comfortable.

Young members typically use these groups to ask questions, network to build professional relationships, and learn about new developments in their field.

An additional benefit of such groups involves marketing. Associations that are ahead of the curve use online groups to promote in-person events to their members.

Of course, your social media presence must be excellent to attract and engage young members. They are used to judging organizations by their online presence, and **you need to follow best practices** to make sure you're appealing to them effectively.

While this advice applies to new members in general, it's critical for associations to figure out exactly what young members need. After all, the only ways to fight the overconfidence bias and false consensus effect is to show humility and ask members what they want.

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