

# CRAIN'S

## DETROIT BUSINESS

SEPTEMBER 12 - 18, 2016

SPECIAL REPORT: ARTS & CULTURE

# How to sell tickets to millennials

Cultural groups try high-tech, interactive options

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Special to Crain's Detroit Business

If the Holocaust Memorial Center can captivate 40,000 schoolchildren who think the horrifying events of the late 1930s and '40s are as ancient as early Greece, certainly it can draw the interests of 19- to 35-year-olds. At least that was the thinking when the Farmington Hills nonprofit began reaching out to millennials.

"We know social justice and action-oriented programs speak to them, and that's exactly what we're trying to create," said Education Director Robin Axelrod.

For the museum's first millennial-targeted program in 2014, Pencils of Promise founder Adam Braun examined social entrepreneurship and social responsibility. Braun, a former rising star on Wall Street, wrote the book *The Promise of a Pencil: How an Ordinary Person Can Create Ordinary Change*, the saga of his experience creating a global nonprofit that built more than 360 schools around the world.



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The turnout was surprising. "We didn't know if 20 people would come or 30 people would come," Axelrod said. But "A couple of hundred young adults attended the event."

The museum has followed up with similar events, including one dedicated to the socially and politically polemical topic of refugees that, Axelrod said, drew people who normally would not step foot in the center.

The idea is simple: Get them in the door for a topic they care about and then expose them to the broader exhibits and purpose.

That strategy falls in line with what Sunil Iyengar at the National Endowment for the Arts understands about young adults and the arts. The director of research and analysis for the NEA, Iyengar said 78 percent of 18- to 24-year-olds cite learning, socialization and networking among the stron-

gest motivating factors for participating in arts-related events.

According to an Aug. 30 NEA report, 76 million Americans, or 32 percent of the population, attended live music, dance or theater in 2015 and 19 percent, or 45 million, attended an art exhibit. Of those patrons, millennials were 17 percent more likely than any other age group to attend.

### Driving engagement

But 18- to 24-year-olds attend fewer fine arts events — art museum exhibits and classical music, jazz, live theater, opera and ballet performances — than they did 10 years ago, the NEA found. Iyengar puts it like this: "The strongest predictor of whether someone attends arts experiences as an adult is whether they had the experience as a child or had arts education in school."

And there's the tech phenomenon — millennials have entertainment media of all kind literally at their fingertips on smartphones and tablets.

"How do you get them to look up from all the information in the world?" asks Linda Ramsay-Detherage, development director for the Jewish Ensemble Theatre in West Bloomfield Township. "You have to get them to cry and laugh, you have to give them an emotional response."

JET's strategy is to shorten performances and take on contemporary issues that intimately relate to the culture.

Broadway in Detroit, which books touring shows for the Fisher Theatre stage, hopes to grab their attention with the edgy, gender-bending "Hedwig and the Angry Inch," starring Neil Patrick Harris, a popular TV sitcom star who also won a Tony in the role on Broadway in 2014. This past summer, Broadway in Detroit held a Tony Awards event at the Maple Theater, with live coverage on Facebook that garnered attention. And Scott Myers, director of corporate sales and marketing for Broadway in Detroit, is looking at what theaters across the country are doing to attract millennials.

### Joining in the performance?

Lindsey Pollack, a millennial workplace expert for The Hartford insurance company in New York, said what appeals to millennials can also appeal to other audiences, but if you want to attract millennials, think about participatory events and unique experiences. "Experiences have currency," she said.

Pop-up performances — where someone suddenly starts singing an aria in a public space — is one of David DiChiera's favorite ways of reaching millennials. "Sometimes people are not sure they want to go to the Opera House, they worry about dress, etc.," the Michigan Opera Theatre founder and artistic director said. "But when you do things in their own settings, they say, 'Hey, I love that singer!'"

Participation and experiences are the reason millennials attend more art and music festivals than other cultural events, Iyengar said. "Festivals have the immediacy of a live experience plus interaction with the artist, mobility and open air. There is a smorgasbord of options."

Already the Music Hall Center for the Performing Arts presents dance, CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

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folk, plays, jazz and rock concerts. Yet when thinking about how to attract younger patrons, the Detroit venue diversified further. "You have to create the environment," said Vince Paul, president and artistic director of the Music Hall.

He said trustees were horrified when he suggested spending \$1 million to open its 3Fifty Terrace nightclub on the roof of the Music Hall. "I said, '21- to 35-year-olds are a demographic, just like the Arab community. If you want to engage them, you have to speak their language!' They think about making money, hooking up, partying and engaging socially."

Paul hopes one day the Music Hall programming and the nightclub, which boasts bottle service, beautiful people and trendy carbon dioxide cryo jets, will work together.

"We can wait for them to hook up, have kids, go to college and then start enjoying our programming, or we can engage them now. Because they come to 3Fifty, they know where to park, they know where the bathrooms are, and where to find the box office," he said. And as they walk by posters promoting violin, ballet and rock band performances on their way up to 3Fifty, "There is no obstacle to buying tickets to a show. These are critical issues and they add up to sales."

Getting millennials in the building isn't a problem for the **Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit**, either. Young professionals often co-work and collaborate in Café 78, a full-service restaurant and bar open six days a week, said MOCAD director of philanthropy Emily Remington.

Still, MOCAD recognizes the need to create age-specific programming, like its Monster Drawing Rally. The rally gives 40 members of MOCAD's 45 and younger New Wave group two



Patrons at 3Fifty Terrace can enjoy bottle service — and a great skyline view.

hours to create a piece of art, which goes up for sale. "It provides them an opportunity to take ownership and be a part of the museum," said Remington, who falls in the millennial age group.

The **Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History** in Detroit, which attracts millennials through events like its annual African World Festival and Black Women Rock concerts, has found this to be true. Museum leadership met the four millennials currently on its board when they were talking to them about the museum. "Then we started to look at them as possible board members and we approached them to help us think things through," said president and CEO Juanita Moore, acknowledging the museum still doesn't have enough younger board members.

Nearly half of the 25 staff members at the **Arab American National Museum** in Dearborn are 18- to 34-year-olds. Director Devon Akmon said hav-

ing a young staff helps shape the museum's outlook and approach with immersive, participatory programs such as workshops with musicians and culinary walking tours.

Getting young people involved in the **Detroit Symphony Orchestra** was a mission for James Farber, chairman of the DSO's Governing Members Executive Committee. He is also founder of **Aclaint, Bloomfield Township**; chairman and CEO of **American Staffing Assurance Co.** and president of **Executive Strategies Inc.**

"He said when he first came to the DSO he was the youngest person there, and 20 years later he was still the youngest member there," Christa Hoen, 25, said with a laugh. She is co-chair of Next Gen, a DSO committee of more than a dozen 18- to 34-year-olds. Hoen is academic support manager for Detroit Regional Dollars for Scholars.

Essentially, Hoen boiled it down to the generation's need for comfort and relatability. Some ways the DSO is en-

gaging millennials is with meet-and-greets with music director Leonard Slatkin and backstage brews, where they can mingle with musicians.

On Sept. 22, the DSO is presenting "Mysterium," an experimental music event where DSO musicians will perform a variety of genres in three venues at the Max to introduce younger patrons to more of what's offered. The Dec. 14 "Home Alone with the DSO" event, where the film will play on a giant screen while the Detroit Symphony Orchestra plays the score, is a great example of relatable programming, Hoen said.

"It's something we all grew up with but you don't realize how much phenomenal music is in the score," Hoen said. "Those are the kinds of experiences millennials need in order to think the symphony is cool."

The DSO also created discount programs for younger generations. Those 37 and younger can participate in 37/11, where they pay \$37 a year and each of their tickets will cost only \$11. A sound card allows students to pay \$25 a year and get in all shows for free.

### High-tech features

Undeniably "cool" to many 18- to 34-year-olds is technology.

The **Henry Ford** in Dearborn, which has millennials on its board, spent \$70 million in 2003 upgrading Greenfield Village to appeal to both newer and older generations, said President Patricia Mooradian. Presenters now use iPads to share more in-depth stories of artifacts not on-site, and they have added a giant-screen experience to Maker Faire, an annual innovation festival at The Henry Ford, allowing attendees to talk with an astronaut at **NASA's Johnson Space Center**.

Attendance rose 32 percent after The Henry Ford created a 4-D theater for the Ford Rouge Factory Tour in 2015, Mooradian said. The audience sits in a

semicircle while music plays, a digitally mapped model of the Ford F-150 rises from the ground and robotic arms show how parts and pieces are added to the vehicle.

"We use all of the social channels as well," Mooradian said. For example, the museum used Snapchat to promote its well-attended Beatles exhibit this summer and has held Snapchat contests.

Larisa Zane, senior communication specialist for the **Detroit Institute of Arts** and a millennial, said allowing photography in the DIA's large-scale museum exhibitions, such as "30 Americans," allows visitors to spread awareness via social media and engage on a digital level. "Social media is a way a lot of millennials communicate," she said.

Zane uses emojis to promote art at the museum on Twitter and used Instagram for its four-city Inside/Out project with the **John S. and James L. Knight Foundation** that included a photo contest and InstaMeet event. "It was the first Instagram meetup we hosted. Our goal was to have about 50 people come out. We had about 75 people," Zane said.

The museum also held a Pokémon Go meetup with local college and high school students. "It allows us to stay relevant," Zane said.

MOCAD's Pokémon promotion on Instagram and Facebook requesting people to come out and make a donation and receive a small gift resulted in a nearly 20 percent increase in membership that period because it was shareable and timely, Remington said.

"The more quickly we react to what's going on, the better (millennials) want to be involved and have a long-term relationship. Gen Ys and millennials have always had Google and had things constantly at their fingertips. We just have to make sure we have everything they want online and interactively."