How to sell tickets to millennials

Cultural groups try high-tech, interactive options

By Leslie D. Green
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If the Holocaust Memorial Center can capture 63,000 schoolchildren who think the terrifying events of the late 1930s and '40s are as ancient as early Greece, certainly it can draw the interest of 18- to 35-year-olds. At least that was the thinking when the Foun- dation for the Arts & Culture 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 Andreoli.

For the museum's first millen- nial outreach program in 2014, Pencils of Promise founder Adam Braun organized a day-long event in Detroit for young people to engage in social justice work.

And while millennials are more tech-savvy than previous generations, Andreoli said, "People who are tech-savvy are not only the trendsetters, they are the trendsetters in the field. It's all about how we engage with them."
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folk, plays, jazz and rock concerts. Yet when thinking about how to attract younger patrons, the Detroit Symphony Orchestra continues to diversify further. "You have to create the environment," said Vincent Powell, president and artistic director of the Music Hall.

He said trustees were horrified when he suggested spending $1 million to open its first Thursday night club on the roof of the Music Hall, "I said, '18 to 25-year-olds are a demographic, just like the Arab community; you want to engage them, you have to speak their language.' They think about making money, looking up parking and engaging socially.

Paul hopes one day the Music Hall programming and the nightlife, which busses in service, beautiful people and trendy bars that the club 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," he said. "Because when they come to the club, they know where to park, they know where the bathrooms are, and where to find the bus offsite." And as they walk by posters promoting video, bullet and rock band performances on their way up to the shop, "These are critical issues and they add up to sales.

Getting Millennials in the building is the equivalent for the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit, of the Detroit Institute of Arts, and that's an art school. Young professionals often co-work and collaborate in Café 78, a full-service restaurant and bar open six days a week, said MOCA director of philanthropy Emily Bemlinge.

Sill, MOCA recognizes the need to create age-specific programming, and its Museum Drawing Rally. The rally gives 40 members of MOCA's 20- and younger New Wave group two hours to create a piece of art, which goes up for sale. "It provides an opportunity to take ownership and be a part of the museum," said Bemlinge, who is in the millennial age group.

Getting involved in the Detroit Symphony Orchestra was a mission for James Harden, chairman of the DSO's Governing Members Executive Committee. He is also founder of Achievement, 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," Chris Foushee, 26, said with a laugh, the co-chair of Next Gen, a DSO committee of more than 150 18- to 34-year-olds. Foushee is assistant support manager for Detroit Regional Dollars for Scholars. Essentially, he brought it down to the generation's need for comfort and reliability. Some ways the DSO is engaging millennials is to meet them and greet them with executive chef Leonard Schmidt and backstage boxes, where they can mingle with musicians.

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

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

The DSO also created discount programs for younger generations. Those 18 and younger can participate in 33/31, where they pay $7.50 a year and each of their tickets will cost only $1. A sound card allows students to pay $7 a year and get in all shows for free.

High-tech features

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

The Henry Ford in Dearborn has multimedia on its board, spent $37 million in 2003 upgrasing Greenfield Village to appeal to both newer and older generations, said President Pam White. "We allow people to share more in-depth stories of artifacts not on display, and they have added a giant screen to experience Maker Faire, an annual innovation festival at The Henry Ford, allowing attendees to talk with an expert at NASA's Johnson Space Center. Attendance rose 32 percent after The Henry Ford created a 4-D theatre for the Ford Rouge History Tour in 2015. Meanwhile, the audience sits in semi-reclined white leather chairs, a digitally scanned model of the Ford F-150 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," Moon said. "For example, the museum used Twitter to promote its well-attended foreign exhibit this summer and has held Facebook events."}

Linda Tarn, senior communications specialist for the Detroit Institute of Arts and a millennial, said allowing photography in the DSO's large-scale music exhibits, such as "20 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 sends Instagram photos for its city-wide "Let's Meet project with the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation that included a photo contest and Instagram contest. "It was the first Instagram meet we hosted. Our goal was to have about 50 people come out. We had about 75 people," Zane said.

The museum also held a Pokemon Go meetup with local college and high school students. "It allows us to reach out," Zane said.

MOCA's Pokemon promotion on Instagram and Facebook requesting people to come out and make a donation and receive a small gift resulted in a nearly 60 percent increase in membership that period because it was shareable and trendy, Bemlinge said. "The more quickly we are able to what's going on, the better (millennials) will be involved and have a long-term relationship. Gen Z 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 immediately."