



**Attracting Young Professionals to Your Organization**

**A Benchmarking Study**

**February 25, 2010**

**Building The Pipeline of Members. What's New. What Works.**

Generation Y. Much has been written about this hard-to-reach audience. At 71 million members, they are the fastest-growing segment of the workforce and a critical audience for associations to recruit. It's been reported that they don't read emails, they don't watch TV and they refuse to work at a job where they can't make a difference. While this may not be true for every member of this generation, there is one undeniable truth: they are very selective about who they listen to.

How do you reach to this group? According to the association executives who participated in this study, it is by being AUTHENTIC, building TRUST and developing a professional NETWORK that is meaningful.

In January, Avenue M Group, LLC (Avenue M) launched a survey to benchmark how associations are marketing to this audience. The following are the key findings from the study:

Key Finding #1: Colleagues, supervisors and employers play key roles in introducing young professionals to associations.

Key Finding #2: Face-to-face recruitment programs are an effective way to recruit young professionals.

Key Finding #3: Individual discounts and free trials are the most effective incentives for recruiting young professionals; yet many associations do not offer any discounts or promotions.

Key Finding #4: Although the general membership mailing is the most commonly cited tool for communicating with young professionals, associations have expanded their efforts to include more segmented communications as well.

## Survey Method

The Young Professional Survey was launched online January 8, 2010, and was left open to respondents until January 29, 2010. More than 150 professionals from independent membership associations responded to the survey and supplied data from their organization.

Not all of the respondents answered every question.

## Industry

- ▶ 28% in health care
- ▶ 20% in science/engineering
- ▶ 17% in finance/accounting
- ▶ 9% in real estate/const.
- ▶ 8% in legal
- ▶ 8% in association mgt.
- ▶ 7% in education
- ▶ 4% in other industries

## Geographic Scope

- ▶ 47% international
- ▶ 30% national
- ▶ 16% state
- ▶ 6% local

## Membership

- ▶ 9% have 1,000 or less
- ▶ 29% have 1,001-5,000
- ▶ 12% have 5,001-10,000
- ▶ 18% have 10,001-20,000
- ▶ 8% have 20,001-30,000
- ▶ 7% have 30,001-40,000
- ▶ 10% have 50,000-100,000
- ▶ 5% have 100,000+

## Operating Budget

- ▶ 52% have less than \$5M
- ▶ 13% have \$5M - \$9.9M
- ▶ 16% have \$10M - \$19.9M
- ▶ 13% have \$20M - \$49.0M
- ▶ 4% have \$50M - \$99.9M
- ▶ 3% have more than \$100M

## February 2010

Welcome to Avenue M Group's *Young Professional Benchmarking Report 2010*. In January 2010, we launched an online survey to collect information on how associations are recruiting, retaining and communicating with young professionals. The goal was to identify effective ways to engage with a demographic that is increasingly becoming a priority for most organizations.

We are pleased to present these findings in this benchmarking report. We welcome your comments and feedback and look forward to serving the association industry with other benchmarking reports in the future.

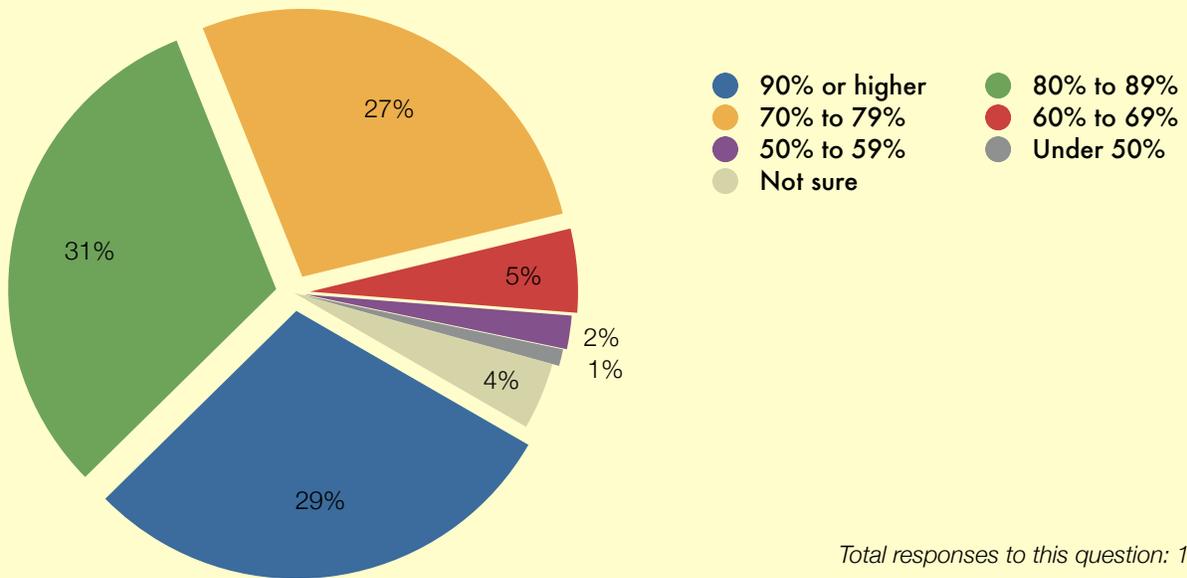
Cheers,



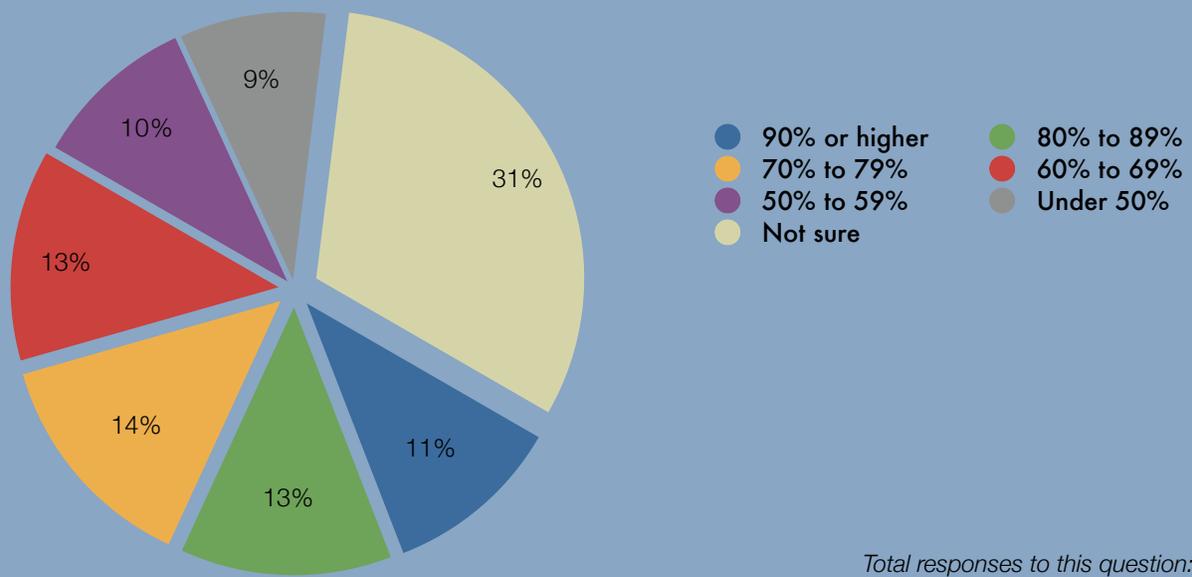
Sheri Jacobs, CAE

President + Chief Strategist

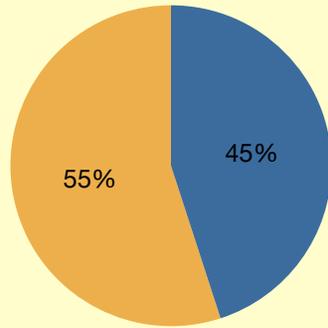
What is your association's overall renewal rate?



What is the renewal rate for members after the first year they must pay the full dues amount?



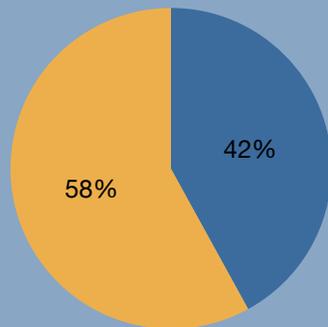
Are young professionals on your governing board?



● Yes ● No

Total responses to this question: 114

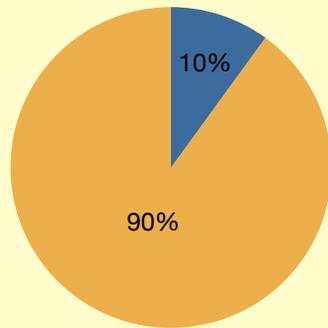
Does your association offer tiered membership dues based on years in practice?



● Yes ● No

Total responses to this question: 115

Does your association offer tiered annual meeting fees based on years in practice?



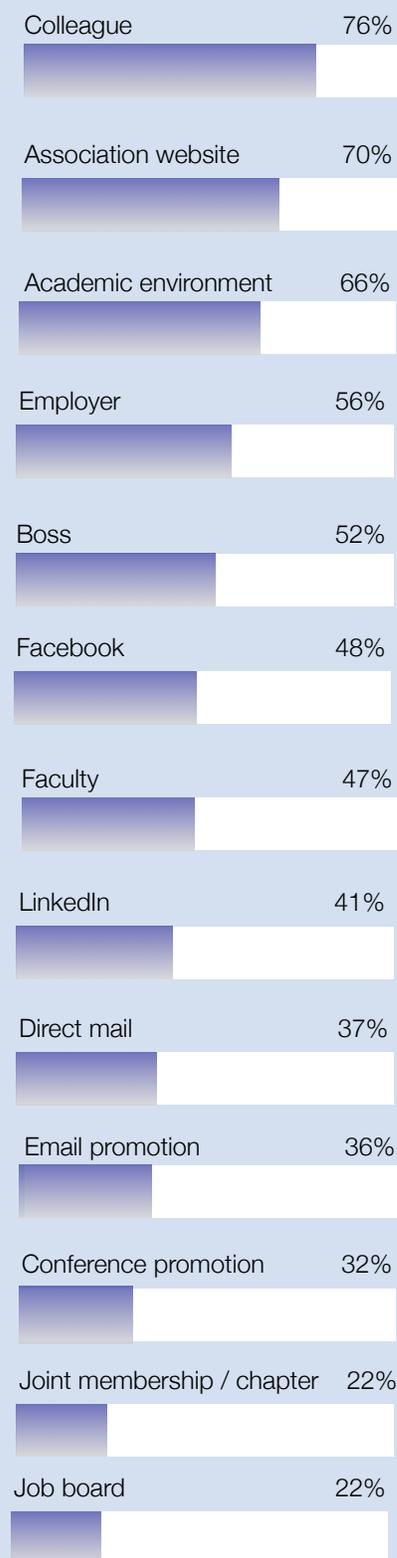
● Yes ● No

Total responses to this question: 114

Table 1

## How do young professionals first learn about your association?

(Select all that apply)



Total responses to this question: 157

### Key Finding #1

**Colleagues, supervisors and employers** play key roles in introducing young professionals to associations.

When asked how young professionals (YP) first learned about their association, 76% of survey respondents selected *colleagues* and 56% selected *employers*. A significant percentage of young professionals also become aware of the association through the organization's *website* (70%) and through their *academic environment* (66%).

Only 37% of survey respondents report using *direct mail* to create awareness among young professionals about their organization and 36% report using *email* to generate awareness.

When Avenue M conducted a cross-tab based on geographic scope, we found some small but important differences.

### Top 5 Based on Geographic Scope

#### International (N=82)

- ▶ 74% Colleague
- ▶ 72% Association Website
- ▶ 67% Academic Environment
- ▶ 57% Facebook
- ▶ 52% Employer

#### National (N=34)

- ▶ 65% Academic Environment
- ▶ 62% Association Website
- ▶ 62% Colleague
- ▶ 47% Boss
- ▶ 47% Employer

#### State + Local (N=41)

- ▶ 92% Colleague
- ▶ 80% Association Website
- ▶ 72% Employer
- ▶ 64% Academic Environment
- ▶ 56% Direct Mail

How effective are the following **marketing tactics** in recruiting young professionals? (5=Most effective, 1=Least effective)

Table 2

Retention rates for first year paying full dues amount	90% or higher	80% to 89%	70% to 79%	60% to 69%	50 to 59%
<b>Faculty/academic recommendation</b>	<b>4.17</b>	<b>4.18</b>	<b>3.75</b>	<b>4.00</b>	<b>4.00</b>
Personal Sales	<b>4.00</b>	2.83	3.00	2.88	3.00
<b>Association website</b>	<b>3.50</b>	<b>3.50</b>	<b>3.50</b>	3.00	<b>3.68</b>
<b>Member referral program</b>	<b>3.33</b>	<b>3.69</b>	3.17	<b>3.86</b>	3.12
Email promotion	3.14	2.90	<b>3.50</b>	2.92	3.00
Annual meeting promotion	3.12	3.07	2.79	2.87	2.29
Social networking site	3.12	3.10	3.40	2.45	3.28
Direct mail	3.00	3.00	3.33	2.92	2.73
Public relations	3.00	3.40	2.20	2.20	2.00
Group billing program through employer	3.00	2.33	3.44	3.00	<b>3.38</b>
Telemarketing	2.33	2.00	2.86	2.43	2.12
Trade show marketing	2.14	2.17	3.08	2.08	2.17
Joint membership program with chapter or state association	2.00	3.00	2.71	<b>3.20</b>	3.09
Advertising in print publications	1.33	2.57	2.86	1.83	2.15
Online advertisements	1.33	2.60	3.00	1.89	2.27
Search engine optimization	1.00	2.50	3.00	2.20	2.40

Total responses to this question: 129

## Key Finding #2

### Face-to-face recruitment programs are an effective way to attract young professionals.

Three out of the top four tactics for recruiting young professionals include some form of face-to-face interaction with a trusted advisor. Some specific tactics being used by associations to recruit young professional members include the following (collected from the open-ended comments):

- ▶ We have a full time staff person that makes or coordinates presentations for students at least three times a year at 27 colleges in our state. He also builds relationships with advisors. We also have the director go to colleges with chapters and meet the head of the department or dean. We hold about 14 strictly networking events around the state a year focused on young professionals, where students can talk to young professionals. There is an active Facebook group for them. We have a dedicated website for them, with blogs (written by young professionals) and discounts (and help) for the review courses and professional ethics. We give away \$40,000 a year in scholarships, plus 10 free review courses. We offer reduced rates for membership fees and run promotions at times. We also give free membership to the presidents of the local clubs to start the relationships. Basically, we are flexible and try to cover all options. We went from 300 members in that category 3 years ago (when we started these tactics) to 1300+ members in that category today. For the professional members in that group, we retain about 96%.
- ▶ Office visits with CEOs to explain benefits.
- ▶ We sponsor career fairs and networking events on-campus to connect students with professionals in the field.
- ▶ Developing a culture at academic institutions that encourages young professionals to join.
- ▶ Student leadership program funded by the association and conducted through the student chapter.
- ▶ We invite prospects to our annual fall young professional networking event at trendy location hosted by membership committee. Each young professional has a "dance card" that guarantees he or she will meet at least four leaders of our association. We invite prospects to a free leadership development session each spring. Each guest is assigned a buddy to introduce him or her to leaders and other active members.
- ▶ We host a recognition dinner for all newly credentialed members in the state. It's our largest recruiting effort and pays off well.
- ▶ We hold in-person recruitment events held in conjunction with local sections (chapters), targeted specifically at young professionals.
- ▶ The NGen program is our program for developing the next generation of leaders in the nonprofit sector. Special conference track and other events during our annual conference, We offer fellowships (in this case, fully paid scholarships to attend the annual conference, including expenses).
- ▶ We have a next generation campaign that features the accomplishments of young professionals who are members and how their membership helps them get it done

### Key Finding #3

## Individual discounts and free trials are the most effective incentives for recruiting young professionals, yet many associations do not offer any discounts or promotions.

According to the data collected in this study, students and young professionals respond positively to discounts and free offers. Other incentives offered by associations include free products, travel grants, free lunchtime seminars, free student memberships, free section memberships, and free networking events and networking groups (such as ones created on Facebook and LinkedIn). It is noteworthy that many associations do not offer any type of incentive such as a discount, premium or free gift.

Table 3

How effective are the following incentives when recruiting young professionals?						
Item	Very effective	4	3	2	Not at all effective	N/A
Dues discount for the first year	25%	20%	19%	7%	1%	28%
Free trial	14%	19%	12%	5%	3%	47%
Conference discount	12%	24%	23%	19%	6%	16%
Product discount	4%	17%	20%	19%	4%	36%
Rewards or referral program	3%	13%	17%	15%	5%	47%
Group discount	2%	8%	8%	9%	3%	69%
Free gifts or premiums	1%	9%	24%	15%	6%	45%
Money-back guarantee	0%	3%	3%	5%	6%	82%

Total responses to this question: 146

Other responses collected through the open-ended question include:

- ▶ Member-only job networking events and directories
- ▶ A formal Young Professional Network for networking, resources and job opportunities
- ▶ Program that offers incentives to join and is offered through employers
- ▶ Access to student chapters
- ▶ Free virtual membership for young professionals

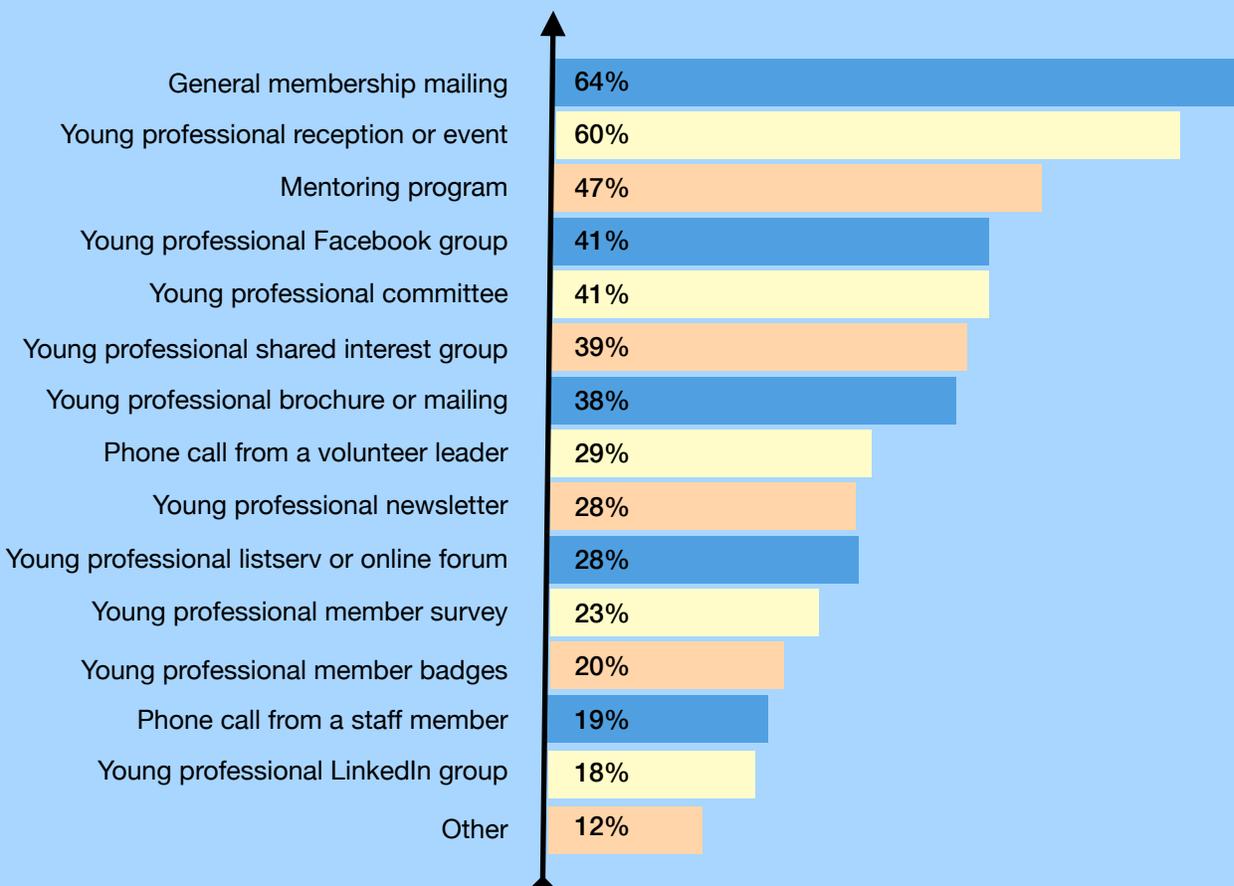
## Key Finding #4

Although the **general membership mailing** is the most commonly cited tool for communicating with young professionals, associations have expanded their efforts to include **more segmented communications** as well.

Associations with retention rates of 80% or higher for members during their first year they pay the full dues amount are more likely to create opportunities for young professionals to interact in-person with other members.

Table 4

Does your association use any of the following communication methods to engage **young professional members**? (Select all that apply)



Total responses to this question: 152



## About Avenue M Group, LLC

When associations are looking to address some of their most critical challenges, they turn to the Avenue M Group.

Avenue M helps organizations:

- Keep their brands fresh and relevant
- Define their competitive edge
- Attract and engage members
- Increase attendance and satisfaction at association events.

Additional information can be found at [www.avenuemgroup.com](http://www.avenuemgroup.com) or by contacting us at 847.236.1920.

### **Sheri Jacobs, CAE, President + Chief Strategist**

Sheri is a frequent speaker and a contributor to various associations and publications. She is an association veteran with more than 15 years experience. She is a past chair for ASAE and The Center for Association Leadership Membership Council and a current member of the Marketing Council. She is also the co-editor and contributor of Membership Essentials (ASAE 2008) and author of 199 Ideas: Powerful Marketing Tactics that Sell (ASAE 2010). Sheri can be reached at [jacobs@avenuemgroup.com](mailto:jacobs@avenuemgroup.com).