

*Improving the lives of women and girls
 through programs leading to social
 and economic empowerment.*

## Soroptimist International of the Americas

**Millennials: Communicating and Marketing Soroptimist**

As a group, Millennials are the largest target market for Soroptimist—they now outnumber Baby Boomers and are about double the size of Generation X. Keep in mind, by 2025 they will be 75 percent of the global workforce and they are already starting to become a major consumer group.

They are savvy about being marketed to and want to be treated with respect, not condescended to as know-nothing “kids.” Due to their generally positive outlook on the world, messages that include scare tactics, doomsday statistics or disturbing images will turn them off.

Instead, emphasizing the positive outcomes of Soroptimist’s programs and how Millennials can do something to improve the lives of women and girls will resonate with this group. Clubs should focus on our Dream Programs—the Live Your Dream Award and Dream it Be It—which help women and girls in concrete ways—and highlight the results and effects on the lives of women and girls. These programs define our brand and are what we want to be known for. All club activities should back up the promise of our brand as well as maintain an encouraging atmosphere among members in order to be attractive to Millennials.

Traditionally, organizations like Soroptimist are not inclusive of Millennial principles and ideas, and this is one of the reasons for declining membership. Baby Boomers, who are running organizations, may have forgotten what it’s like to be younger, innovative, and influential. Unknowingly, an exclusive atmosphere has been created that caters to Baby Boomers. If clubs want to attract younger members, Soroptimists must be inclusive—catering to the needs, values, and interests of Millennials so they feel as if they belong.

Check out these other tips to communicate and market Soroptimist successfully to Millennials:

Before marketing to new members, it is important for a club to gauge its attractiveness to prospects by performing an assessment, or “health check.” Just as we sometimes take our own health for granted, clubs also tend to take their health for granted. An assessment can provide invaluable insights into a club’s health by identifying strengths and weaknesses—and opportunities for improvement. A sample club assessment is available in the membership section of the members area of www.soroptimist.org.\*

Word-of-mouth marketing influences Millennials, whether it’s purchasing a product or joining an organization. For Soroptimist, word-of-mouth marketing refers to satisfied and happy members telling others about their experiences. It’s the “reviews” you see online when you are about to purchase a product—this organization seems great, but what do the members really have to say about it? Millennials will want to know and will seek out the answers. Make sure members spread the word and can accurately and honestly tell others about what Soroptimist means to them and how it’s improved their own life. Use the resources at www.soroptimist.org\* to promote a happy, healthy, civil club atmosphere.

Email is good way to reach Millennials, though some on the younger end of this generation may see email as antiquated. Other modes of communications that work well are texting, instant messages (Yahoo! Messenger, iChat), and Facebook messages. Keep in mind this generation is always “connected” in some way, so employing a variety of communications methods is optimal. Just ask your prospective Millennial members the best way to reach them—email, text, through Facebook, or through some other means.

Millennials are seeking to be part of something where the culture is positive, engaging and service oriented. Clubs need to keep in mind they need to be flexible if they want younger members—remember, some Millennials have just begun, or are about to begin, the chaotic stage of starting young families. They expect convenience and customization. They’ve been given more choices and access than any other generation, so they have never had to settle for what they deem inadequate, irrelevant or anything that makes them unhappy—and they aren't going to start now.

If you are not online, you don’t exist to Millennials. They are digital natives—they have been exposed to new technologies since birth. They are always connected and spend a lot of time online. They research every company, brand, and organization they come in contact with, which means clubs need to have a website that is up-to-date and visually pleasing. Need to modernize your website or create one? Try using SIA’s Website Templates for Clubs available at www.soroptimist.org.\*

Facebook is being used by Millennials but more so as a news source, getting consumer information (liking brands, providing reviews), and for privately communicating with friends. They are also more likely to access Facebook on their smartphones rather than a computer. If you haven't done so already, create and regularly post to your club’s Facebook page. Post events and programs the club is working on and how people can easily get involved. In need of content? “Share” posts from SIA and LiveYourDream.org’s Facebook pages. Information, interesting facts, photographs, and videos relevant to Soroptimist and our mission are posted daily.

Is someone checking your club’s email address? This is another vital link between your club and prospective members. With approximately 1,800 visits to our website every day, it’s important that prospective Millennials have an easy and quick way to connect with your club at the local level. Instructions for accessing and using the club email are available at www.soroptimist.org.\*

It’s important to focus on prospective member values. Being with other like-minded women, and friendship and fellowship made it to the top of the list of what potential Millennial members value when looking to join a membership organization. Even though they spend a lot of time online, Millennials still deeply value face-to-face connections and building friendships. Make sure your club is focused on programs and projects that support our mission. To appeal to Millennials, clubs should also be committed to a friendly, warm and welcoming environment that reflects the spirit of Soroptimist.

Other top values in order of importance for this group were volunteer opportunities, personal connection to the mission, leadership and personal development opportunities. Demonstrate these values by:

* Honoring a woman with a Live Your Dream Award.
* Participating in Dream It Be It.
* Inviting Millennial prospects to join in hands-on projects and events.
* Using the Capacity Inventory resource available at www.soroptimist.org\* to find out what skills prospects are looking to use and develop.

Millennials are an enthusiastic group who will be ready to get involved right away, make their mark and make a difference. Invite them to participate in a project or event soon after they join. If club leaders or other members squash their eagerness, Millennials won’t hesitant to drop their membership. Plus, because they are into “sharing” they will let the world know about their negative experience through their online social networks. Keep in mind their strong relationships with their parents who gave them an equal voice. Leaders should be prepared to collaborate and work together with this generation.

Convenience matters a lot to Millennials. The easier they can access information about your club and how to join the better. Also, if your Soroptimist club is perceived to be outdated, unfriendly, or aging, Millennials are not likely to join. Millennials want to be part of something innovative and progressive. They will not engage in organizations that deliver negative experiences.

Another focal point as you market to Millennials should be on Soroptimist’s global scope. If your club is part of a Friendship Link, share how that experience and direct contact with women in another country has enriched your membership. These young adults see themselves as part of a global picture already, so the international component of Soroptimists’ work will appeal to them. They may be excited about the prospect of one day attending an SIA Convention in another country and meeting Soroptimists from all over the world who have similar values.

If possible, build a recruitment team of younger members to recruit Millennials. They are more likely to join a club and feel comfortable with their peers who can help them see how they can connect to Soroptimist and can tell them the value Soroptimist brings to their life. Millennials will be loyal to people, not companies or organizations.

Millennials have told us the number one reason they are interested in specifically joining Soroptimist is to help improve the lives of women and girls. Again, it’s important to showcase how your club does that—through the Live Your Dream Awards, Dream It Be It, and other women- and girl- focused projects your club participates in within the community.

Other top reasons Millennials stated for wanting to join Soroptimist (in order of importance): to provide education opportunities for women (Live Your Dream Awards!), to raise awareness about domestic violence, to mentor girls (Dream It, Be It!), and to meet people in their community. In your messaging, emphasize how your club addresses these issues.

Potential Soroptimist Millennial members who inquired about joining but did not do so said the number one reason was because no one from the club ever contacted them after they initially expressed interest. This is an easy fix! Simply follow-up on all leads—send a text or send an email to potential Millennial members. Give them a day to respond—but don’t hesitate to follow-up again. Let them know they are important from day one by demonstrating you are interested in telling them more about Soroptimist and having them join! Quick responses are expected and first impressions are very important to Millennials.

Though they are tethered to technology and social media, Millennials will volunteer because of personal engagement and human connection—they enjoy both learning and the people they meet in a volunteer group. Millennials like to be on a team—and a great way to do that is in person through a Soroptimist club. And while they do love collaboration, they also need to be recognized individually for their efforts and contributions (remember—growing up, everybody was a winner).

Target women on university campuses for potential membership, tap sororities’ members to join, or even charter a new club on campus. Sorority sisters already know what it's like to join together with like-minded women, provide community service, and to share in fun and friendship while in a club setting. At the very least, clubs can partner with campus groups to participate in mutually beneficial programs or projects—thereby laying the seeds for future membership.

Consider adding a short teambuilding exercise to your meetings to build and demonstrate camaraderie to current and potential Millennial members. Working in a team and collaborating appeals to Millennials very much so show how members work with each other and other community groups to make changes locally and globally.

Millennials are eager to learn new things. Baby Boomers, the majority of our members, like to be coaches. It’s the perfect opportunity to build connections and meet the needs of both groups. Start or highlight your club’s mentoring program when recruiting younger members. It’s a great way to engage both current and potential Millennial members. You can even try out two-way mentoring! Could your members or club leadership use a primer on social media or technology? Pair up new Millennial members with seasoned members so they can both teach each other about the things they know best.

Millennials like to volunteer on their own terms. Inviting them to visit, sign-up and become part of LiveYourDream.org’s online community is an effective way of introducing them to Soroptimist. You can also point them to LiveYourDream.org’s blog, as many Millennials read at least one blog daily.

Finally, take note of the following examples of marketing messages and tips that appeal to Millennial audiences:

* Speak to Millennials about doing things together. “Together, we can accomplish….” “We” is a key word with Millennials.
* Talk about shared values, doing things for the world and collaboration.
* Tap into their relationship with their Baby Boomer parents.

([Ehret](http://themarketingspot.com/author/jayehret), 2011)

**\*Need help finding the resources on www.soroptimist.org? Contact headquarters at siahq@soroptimist.org or call 215-893-9000.**

*Sources and references:*

Dunleavy, N., Gloss, D., Sylvia, L. “Engaging the Younger Generations as Employees, Volunteers, and Donors.” Free Library of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA. September 9, 2014.

Ehret, J. (June 30, 2011). Marketing to Millennials—Generation Y. Retrieved from http://themarketingspot.com/2011/06/marketing-to-millennials-generation-y.html.

Ivey, L. (February 4, 2015. How to manage multi-generational nonprofit staff and volunteers [Webinar] In *Nonprofit Webinar Series*. Retrieved from http://www.nonprofitwebadvisor.com/schedule/detail/How-to-Manage-Multi-Generational-Nonprofit-Staff-Volunteers.

Sladek, S. (2014) *Knowing Y: Engage the Next Generation Now.* Washington, DC. ASAE: The Center for Association Leadership.