

Write for Newbies



Melynn Sicht is president of nSight Marketing (www.nightsightmarketing.com). As a marketing adviser and consultant, she has dedicated her business to real estate associations.

Communicating with new members—especially young members—can seem like a challenge given that they're busy, used to getting their information from the Internet, and aren't familiar with the value of your offerings. How do you ever get those young members' attention, let alone make sure that your messages will be effective enough to encourage continued membership?

There's good news in this arena. Researchers have determined not only how to write effectively for younger readers, but also how to make your written communications more effective for *all* your readers. After all, many of your older and more long-term members share the same short attention span and busy lifestyle as your younger members.

Here are five ways to immediately improve your brochures, e-mails, newsletters, and Web sites to reach younger members.



1. Focus on headlines and bullet points rather than blocks of copy.

Young people don't read—they scan. Make maximum use of headlines, subheads, and bul-

let points that jump out and catch a young reader's attention, especially when it comes to your key points.

2. Speak directly to young members in the first person.

Your high school English teacher may have taught you to never use the word "you" in a piece of writing, but today it's not only accepted, it's encouraged. Addressing your members as the familiar "you" rather than the more formal third person is the verbal equivalent of reaching out your hand to young readers.

The Florida Association of REALTORS® Web site's Getting Started section (www.floridarealtors.org/GettingStarted/index.cfm) is a great example of this more casual approach. The page features a picture of a young woman whose hand is outstretched, beckoning other young REALTORS® to enter the site and learn from the association. Not only does the picture tell younger members they are welcome, the words

on the page speak directly to those new arrivals as well: "You say you're a rookie?" the page asks.

3. Write about your young members and their issues.

These days, most associations' mission statements say something about how they care about young members. Short of posting your mission statement on your Web site, how do you make sure young members *know* you care? One way is to write about them. You might incorporate a monthly feature in your magazine or newsletter profiling a young member. This signals to other young people that their contributions are valued.

4. Make young members feel included by explaining how things work.

We often make new members feel like outsiders by using jargon or insider language they don't understand, such as RPAC or CIPS. Scour your written communications to make sure you aren't using terms that

only longtime members can understand.

5. Communicate benefits to your younger members in specific terms.

Today's younger association members want to know what your association can do for them. Since you're providing multiple services, such as classes, networking opportunities, and legislative updates, make sure you let them know what each of these means to their career. Perhaps you offer a class in residential construction that longtime members recognize as very valuable. Don't assume your new members will automatically recognize the value, too. Instead, use your outreach materials to point out specifically what they will learn in the class and how it will accelerate their careers.

A common mistake is to worry you're telling members things they already know. In general, you can't go wrong if you write all material so it will appeal to your newest and youngest member. ■