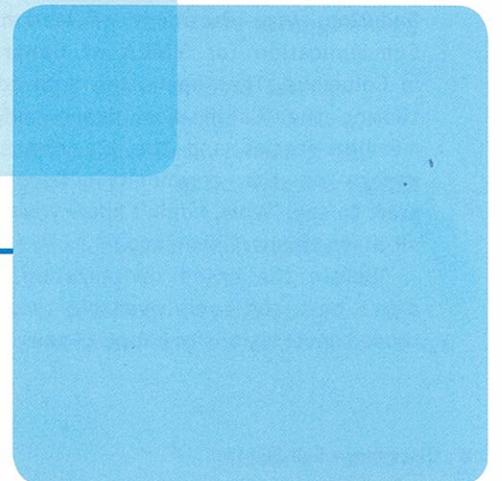
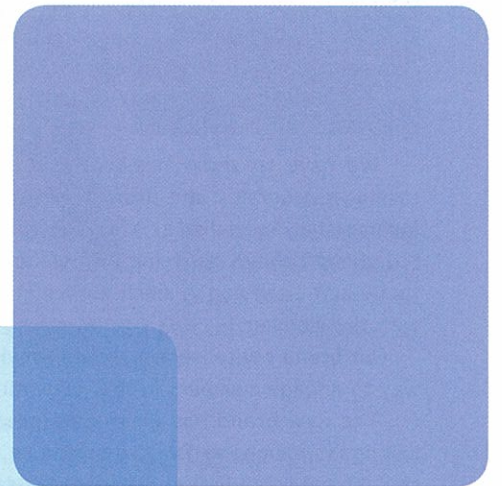




MEMBERS IN A CAUSE

Better aligning membership practices
with our brand promise opens up new
opportunities to communicate our value.

by Michelle Bowles Jackson



OUR RENEWED FOCUS ON STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY THROUGH YOUTH DEVELOPMENT, HEALTHY LIVING AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY GIVES Ys— AND OUR MEMBERS—A COMMON CAUSE.

Members aren't simply joining a local gym or a community center when they choose the Y. Rather, they become a vital part of the leading nonprofit dedicated to strengthening the foundations of community.

Aligning our membership practices and the member experience with our brand promise means we must be clearer than ever before about what the Y stands for and what membership in the Y means.

"We have to show members that they are not just partaking in programs and using facilities," says Ginger Hepler, Membership Specialist at YMCA of the USA. "The revitalized brand is all about clarifying that we are much more than that—and clarifying it much earlier in the relationship with the member."

Our brand revitalization should provide an effective way to engage members in that education.

"The new brand has given us a great platform to engage members. They're asking us, 'Why has this changed? What's different?'" says Tina Badurina, Vice President of Marketing and Communication for **YMCA of Central Ohio** in Columbus. That opens the door to sharing the Y's mission, real-world member stories and the Y's direct impact on the community. "People start to say, 'Wow, I didn't know you do all these things,'" she says.

"Before the brand revitalization, we didn't have the tools available to allow those conversations to happen," says Jamie

Bruning, Vice President of Membership and Program Development for the **YMCA of Philadelphia and Vicinity**. "Now we're using the brand revitalization to communicate why we are what we are and the impact members have when they are here."

In, Of and For Community

Our brand promise challenges us to respond to our communities, and that includes membership. "When you walk into your Y, it should look like your community. The people you see there are the people you see in the grocery store, in your schools, in your neighborhood," Hepler says.

Programs and services need to connect to real needs—and we must preserve and promote that connection as part of member recruitment. For example, in communities with sizable senior populations, a large number of health and wellness programs should be tailored for an older generation. In largely Hispanic communities, many programs could be delivered in Spanish. To gain a deeper understanding of local needs, Hepler suggests talking to non-members to find out why they don't have a relationship with the Y.

Membership categories also need to align with community demographics.

"In the past, many Ys' family memberships were limited to a mom, a dad



and 2.5 kids. But today, that's not what a lot of American families look like," Hepler says. Being accessible to all may mean coming up with new membership categories, like household memberships that are more reflective of our communities, be they older, gay or more intergenerational in their household makeup.

Finally, Ys must ensure price isn't a barrier—although that shouldn't automatically translate to temporary member discounts. In recent years, Ys have gathered data on their service area demographics in order to offer fair and equitable pricing. Asking focus groups of non-members if they have not joined due to the cost of membership fees can help Ys better understand the community's perception of the promoted price. "We need to be mindful that price can look like a barrier to some, even though financial assistance may be available," Hepler says.

Along with what they charge, Ys may need to reassess how they charge. Typically members either pay the annual fee in full or it is electronically drafted monthly from a bank account, Hepler says. But if a substantial number of people in the community are not capable of paying a large upfront fee or maintaining a bank account, Ys could consider a charging process that allows for incremental payments.

Up Close and Personal With Members

Our work in *Activate America*, our brand revitalization and the cause behaviors articulated in Y-USA's strategic plan all encourage us to dig deeper with members. That's also how we make connections and

increase engagement with the Y. People are joining the Y for a supportive relationship, whether that be tied to child care, exercise or an arts program. The glue—the retention—is in the relationships they develop.

The **YMCA of Franklin-Grove City** in Pennsylvania has reworked its membership

SEER Analytics found that the No 1 reason members leave their Y is lack of engagement. Ys must begin to move away from customer satisfaction only and instead concentrate on the member experience. There are six main drivers of member retention that, when achieved, translate to engaged, dedicated members.

ENGAGING OUR MEMBERS

FACILITY: Is your Y facility clean, safe and adequately equipped?

SUPPORT: Do you have a friendly, informed and competent staff who reflect your community?

VALUE: Do members feel they are getting a good value at your Y, including the value for the money and quality of classes?

ENGAGEMENT: Does your staff positively interact with members, including actively listening, knowing members by name and building member-to-member relationships?

IMPACT: Are you helping members meet their health and wellness goals, have you built small communities in your Y and have members changed behaviors because of your staff and programming?

INVOLVEMENT: Do members recognize the Y as a nonprofit leader, reaching out to all in the community regardless of ability to pay? Do members volunteer or contribute, or would they if asked?

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THE MEMBER EXPERIENCE

What is the experience of members like when Ys successfully align membership practices with the brand promise? It's all summed up in five points:

1 ATMOSPHERE

The atmosphere of the Y reflects our values and voice attributes. It is encouraging, supportive and relationship-based. Programs clearly speak to our three areas of focus: nurturing the potential of kids, promoting healthy living and fostering a sense of social responsibility. Staff is knowledgeable about the mission of the Y.

2 SUPPORT

Staff members sincerely care for members and are committed to helping them reach their goals. The Y views individual member and community success as its own success, and finds a sense of pride in that.

3 CONNECTIONS

Members can connect with other members through member groups, programs of interest and community work—enabling them to build meaningful and deep relationships.

4 OPTIONS

The Y understands its community's particular needs, offers programs that speak to those needs—and connects members with those programs.

5 INSPIRATION

When they walk in the door, members see photos and stories of people who have been impacted by the Y. Members believe that they are a vital part of a cause-driven organization and feel a sense of community responsibility.

practices to develop deeper relationships with members, reducing member attrition by 25 percent. "We've encouraged our staff to get out of the mold of what they were doing before and instead respond to each individual member," says Adam J. Cook, Director of Operations of the Y of Franklin-Grove City.

In the past, when a potential member entered a Y branch, any staff member who was available would conduct a facility tour. "Not everyone received the same quality of tour. And while there was definitely some conversation about why they should join and some relationship building, it was nowhere near what it is today," Cook says.

Today, the Y of Franklin-Grove City has a renewed emphasis on customer service and uses many of the Listen First recommendations. A staff member interviews all potential members, inquiring about their needs and helping them fill out the application.

The Y employee has a list of four or five questions that he or she asks every potential member beginning with, "What brought you in?" From there, the

staff member asks more targeted questions based on responses. If the potential member wants to improve his or her health, the staff member might ask, "What obstacles have you experienced before in trying to get healthy?"

"It has to be personal. It can't be robotic," Cook says. "Most people who leave do so because they weren't successful in getting what they wanted out of the experience. How can we help them succeed and stay with the Y if we don't know them better?"

The staff gives each potential member a facility tour aimed at communicating the

