

20 Ways to Get
Connected to the
Next Generation:

***Practical Solutions for
Young Professionals,
Communities and
Organizations***

Created by: Stuart Mease
City of Roanoke, Virginia
stuartmease@gmail.com
540-641-4444

Tasks for Young Professionals

- Network with everyone you know
- Attend events
- Volunteer your time for local offline community activities
- Read local offline publications
- Conduct information interviews
- Follow up with people
- Find informal mentors

Tasks for Communities

- Create a talent hub capturing contact information of people who want to live in your community
- Pitch your successes to media outlets
- Establish user-generated online calendar of things to do in the region and use the calendar on other content sites
- Make your YP initiative a political issue
- Surround yourself with national YP gurus and assist them with their goals
- Poll high school students to see what it will take for them to stay and do it

Tasks for Organizations and Communities

- Lift up your stars
- Create a site/page dedicated to telling positive personal testimonials
- Establish internal and external YP organizations
- Dedicated organization board spots to members of YP organizations
- Create a public succession plan for organizations of all kinds
- Create a presence in online communities
- Proactively recruit college students

Tasks for Individuals

- **Network with everyone you know**

Input everyone you know into an electronic database of contacts and keep the data accurate and continuously build upon it. Whenever you meet someone new add it to the database. Look for creative ways to connect people within your network. Follow up with those people with the purpose of helping them. Over time, you will realize your network of contacts is your most valuable asset.

- **Attend events**

Go to as many offline events you can so people can identify your face with your name or picture on social networking sites like Facebook and Linked In. Having a good online reputation or brand is important, but it's not enough. You must duplicate it offline. Chances are you are not established in the offline community in which you are living. Those able to have a positive brand presence in both will be the power brokers in years to come. This will drastically separate you from your friends.

- **Volunteer your time for local offline community activities**

Everyone is pressed for time. There are many activities to get done in a day. However, allocate some of your time in volunteering for a non-profit or community organization to interact more personally with the people in your community. It takes little time and the return on your investment will be fantastic. Try to volunteer in at least two of these groups and stick with it for at least one year.

- **Read local offline publications**

Online reading generates a lot of very specific niche content as well as global content. When you are trying to get plugged into the local community you must read local content generated by the people you want to meet. Subscribe to the daily newspaper, DVR local news broadcasts, pickup free monthly publications, and also be on the lookout for specialty business journals to gain important information that will differentiate you from your Gen Y colleagues.

- **Conduct information interviews**

Intentionally and formally setup up information interviews with people you want to be like, work with, or learn from. These experts typically will always take their time to talk about themselves to someone who wants to listen. However, do not ask for a job during these sessions – it is implied. Just talking to these people and following up with them will make you stand out. If you are intimidated by

making the initial contact, do not worry, you never know unless you ask. If they say no, what have you lost? Nothing!

- **Follow up with people**

Perhaps the most overlooked aspect of success is not appropriately following up with people you know or meet. It is the one thing separating excellence from mediocrity. It takes such little time, but the rewards are exponential.

- **Find informal mentors**

Many groups try to create formal mentor programs. Good idea, but many formal mentor programs do not work. Why? Because it is forced and not natural, Xers and Boomers will mentor when it feels right and if they like you. Spend time meeting as many people as possible, try to build rapport and follow up with them. Over time, they will become your mentors.

Tasks for Communities

- **Create a talent hub capturing contact information of people who want to live in your community**

You probably hear a lot of chatter about people wanting to return to your region (i.e. you go to cocktail parties and parents say their son or daughter is looking to come back and needs help). Typically, there is no system or database consisting of all people who are interested in returning or staying, as well as, a periodic communication tool alerting them of jobs.

We created a very simple front-end website. We sent out a press release, got several free offline stories. People began to talk about it and use it. Folks began to see it produced results and it spread to over 3000+ people who wanted to be in our region. There were zero dollars spent specifically promoting the website. Viral marketing and organic search engine optimization generated people from 46 states. We have been able to quantify 80+ success stories of people finding jobs through the database and probably countless others unknown to us.

- **Surround yourself with the national YP gurus and assist them with their goals**

National gurus carry a lot of weight in the attraction and retention of YPs. By aligning your region with these gurus, special and unique circumstances evolve to where your community can benefit from their word of mouth, thus making your image more desirable by outsiders and peers.

- **Media pitches on your successes**

Pitching stories to media outlets about YP initiatives is easier than you think. Perhaps because the media outlets are desperately trying reach this demographic audience, or perhaps most of the reporters who are YPs in a smaller media market can identify with the issue. These PR stories have been great at reaching some of the target audience, but it has also reached the parents of these YPs who have told their children. Also, since most the video clips and news articles are online, we can easily use them to promote/validate our programs with ease through email and other peer-to-peer channels.

- **Establish user-generated online calendar of things to do in the region and use the calendar on other content sites**

The number one thing YPs wanted was a user-generated web site of things to do in the region. Finally, two different groups stepped up simultaneously to deliver a site, yet both having a unique niche. MyScoper.com and RoanokeNights.com both have been very successful in communicating things to do in the region. By having an open source site created by the community, more events are

showcased and therefore enhancing the perception of things to do. Also, syndicating the site on other region-centric content sites has also assisted organizations in not having to dedicate a person to do it manually.

- **Make your YP initiative a political issue**

Attracting and retaining young people is an issue not many people can complain or gripe about. We all want our kids to live close by; therefore, there was rarely negative support for initiatives, if any. In turn, a YP candidate for city council emerged and he amassed the YP votes and created a rather large and powerful voter block, which propelled him to victory. Now there is a visible young professional voice as an elected official. This representation communicates volumes to the next generation.

- **Poll high school students to see what it will take for them to stay**

We created a survey in a local high school class to ask students what they wanted or needed in order to stay. There exist many examples of intolerance of teenagers through rules and control mechanisms. Certainly these limitations are meant for the good of the young person; however, it also has an unintentional negative effect – lack of tolerance. Students are restricted to what they can do. As a result, they do things they are not suppose to do, and spend more time in online communities that do except them. Ultimately, after they graduate they buy a one-way ticket out of the region.

By creating the poll, getting the students to shape it, and reporting on the results, we can begin to implement items that will demonstrate more tolerance of young people and in turn will hopefully make them view their hometown a little bit differently.

The survey becomes a voice and an interactive mechanism for them to shape local government issues that will benefit their sector of the population and work toward retaining them or persuading them to return after college.

Tasks for Organizations and Communities

- **Lift up your stars**

Roanoke native Cameron Johnson (www.cameronjohnson.com) became a serial entrepreneur and millionaire before he graduated high school with his internet companies. In talking with Cameron, I asked him if any regional economic development person had ever asked him for his advice on creating a local entrepreneurship strategy. Of course, his answer was no, but he said that a couple of cities in the Midwest have paid him to come and speak to their communities about economic strategy. From that point, it became a mission and strategy to be Cameron's local PR advocate. Since that conversation we have connected him to dozens of people and speaking engagements, which have resulted in the spreading of his knowledge and story to many other locals.

When he was cast for Oprah's Big Give and his challenge was to come home to help a family, he called asking for our help. Once the Roanoke show aired, millions of people across the country saw how Roanokers came together to help someone in need. Yet the local ABC affiliate failed to participate and their absence was noticeable.

You must lift up your local stars and celebrate their success and not be jealous or bring them down. Having a Cameron Johnson Day or some type of special recognition at a city council meeting costs nothing, but the return is great, especially if it becomes viral.

- **Create a site/page dedicated to telling positive personal testimonials**

Every month the city manager has a breakfast roundtable discussion with local business persons. Each month we hear fantastic positive stories about how people came to Roanoke. We began thinking about how to capture these stories and then broadcast them to a larger audience. We came up with MyRoanokeStory.com. It is a complete user-generated content site that cost very little, yet is a tremendous marketing tool for outsiders and insiders in providing a "real person" feedback on the community, not something generated by the chamber of commerce or convention and visitor's bureau, which may not be realistic.

- **Establish internal and external YP organizations**

At the center of the YP movement has been the emergence of bottom up YP organizations – some affiliated with established organizations such as chambers of commerce and other independent. These groups provide an outlet for YPs to come together on a regular basis to create and build relationships. Often times

these YP organizational events allow people to connect on similar interests, and organic informal sub-YP groups evolve.

Additionally, internal company sponsored YP events and socials also provide an opportunity for company camaraderie, and it blurs social/work lives of employees potentially to the point that they cannot differentiate between the two. When another job opportunity outside the company arises, the employee not only has to consider giving up their job, but also their existing social network, which makes for a more difficult decision and help to retain in their organizations.

- **Dedicated community board spots to members of YP organizations**

Many existing non-profit, government and charitable groups are in dire need of new blood on boards. It's the classic case of an organization not knowing any YPs to ask, and YPs wanting to serve, but no one has asked. By forming strategic alliances with YP groups, organization can refine by-laws to allocate x members of YP group X to their board. This eliminates the need to constantly find new blood and instead puts that task in the hands of the YP group. The organization must also be comfortable relinquishing control of a board spot. Another point to keep in mind is the time of the board meetings. By having these meetings during the day when young professionals are working may not be the best meeting time to accommodate their schedules due to work commitments.

- **Create a public succession plan for organizations of all kinds**

Make it public. Show how people fit into the overall succession plan. Make future plans known instead of keeping it hidden.

- **Create a presence in online communities**

In regions across the nation, individuals are plugging into two different types communities – the region's offline community and the region's online community.

Offline communities consist of individuals going to chamber events reading the local newspaper, listening to the radio and watching the local news. They may also walk the streets and see an acquaintance on their way to Rotary Club luncheon. They have extensive face-to-face interaction.

Online communities consists of people spending time on Linked In rather than attending chamber events, reading blog rather than newspapers, listening to satellite radio rather than local radio stations and watching videos on YouTube rather than local television. They may also sit at their computer and IM or text a friend when walking down the street on their way to a coffee shop with free wi-fi. They have limited face-to-face interaction.

Organizations using communication vehicles common in the offline community are not connecting with people in online communities and vice versa. Organizations must have a presence in both to communicate effectively with its audience.

- **Proactively recruit college students**

Many local college students may not know the attributes your city offers simply because they have never experienced it in person. Therefore, invite them to an informal recruiting event consisting of introduction to employers, a guided walking tour of the city, free food and connection to existing YPs who live in the region currently.

You could take it one step further by going to other region career fairs and try to recruit those young people to your area. At these fairs make sure young professionals are working the booth and you are talking more about the lifestyle than the job. Do something different to make your booth stand out and be the talk and buzz of the fair.