Editorial

Reaching Out to Generation Z:
ASCO Launches Optometry Gives Me Life Campaign

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In any academic environment, it is important to attract high-quality applicants. Success in this area depends on the public's awareness of the profession and the ability to connect to future potential applicants. For optometry schools, the next applicants are the college-age members of Generation Z. To connect with them, ASCO recently embarked on an ambitious public awareness campaign: *Optometry Gives Me Life*. The campaign is highly targeted and designed to raise the visibility of optometry as a career choice, favorably positioning it in the competitive field of health professions education. ASCO reports that early analytics used for gauging the success of the campaign have been robust. (More on that below.)

Getting to Know Generation Z

Understanding the motivations and characteristics of the members of Generation Z is vital in connecting with them. Generation Z includes individuals who were born from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s. Having grown up with the Internet they are known as digital natives. Members of this generation, who make up 25% of the U.S. population, outnumber Baby Boomers and Millennials.[1] Gen Z students describe themselves as loyal, compassionate, thoughtful, open-minded, responsible and determined.[2] They are known to be realistic problem-solvers who appreciate honesty and authenticity.[3] Additionally, they are described as entrepreneurial, innovative, and independent learners who want to initiate social change.[2] This generation grew up with a recession and relatively high unemployment. As a result, it is a generation concerned about financial and job security.[4] However, although Gen Zers are concerned about financial security, they are not willing to settle for a job that is not fulfilling or meaningful.[4] Generation Z is also characterized by being constantly connected to laptops, tablets or smart phones. Unlike Millennials, who experienced AOL dial-up Internet, flip phones and separate devices for making a phone call, playing music and accessing the Web, Gen Zers have it all in one device, the smart phone. As a result, they can access an amazing amount of information almost instantaneously.

The Making of the Campaign

Optometry Gives Me Life is a new public awareness tool for both the profession and individual institutions. In creating the national campaign, ASCO conducted research with focus groups of college-age Gen Z students. The students identified earning potential, autonomy and making a difference in people's lives as important characteristics of a potential profession. The campaign therefore highlights the relevant aspects of an optometric career, including an enticing work-life balance, personal fulfillment, job security and more. It encompasses specialized and targeted social media outreach, publications, ancillary promotional materials, e-mails, direct mail and the campaign's landing page

at www.futureeyedoc.org. It features video profiles of three practicing optometrists. The videos expose viewers to the personal, social and professional lives of the doctors, who are energetic, engaging and interesting.

The campaign presents online to a specifically defined target audience in response to their search history and age. It reaches college-age students pursuing STEM degrees who have expressed an interest in a health profession but may not yet have considered optometry. Internet users whose online presence does not match the specifically defined criteria will not see the ads or other elements associated with campaign. Only those who fit the targeted criteria are directed to the campaign's www.futureeyedoc.org landing page and videos, from which point they can also easily access the additional information that is available.

Creating the Connection

The information presented as part of the *Optometry Gives Me Life* campaign is meant to engage the target audience. As has been noted, members of Generation Z are independent learners who are accustomed to accessing information on their devices. They are easily able to research the profession once exposed to it. Featuring the lives of practicing optometrists should appeal to the audience's desire for authenticity, and the mainly digital distribution of the campaign syncs well with their digital native preferences.

Determining the long-term success of the campaign may take several years, although early results are positive. ASCO reports that in just over four months, the paid ads have been seen more than 19 million times, which is 40% more than the benchmark used to measure click engagement of this type. The percentage of people who watch the campaign's video stories in their entirety is also high: 76% completion, which is 140% higher than the benchmark 30%. In addition, more than 50,000 people have visited the campaign landing page, www.futureeyedoc.org, and engaged with the information. ASCO has also seen a 151.5% increase in program interest through its OptomCAS system compared to this time last year.

I applaud ASCO for taking the initiative to launch this important campaign. The multi-dimensional campaign is creative and connects to the Gen Zs who are optometry's future students and graduates. Monetary support from optometric institutions enabled ASCO to create and launch the campaign. An increase in public awareness of the profession will ultimately impact the the sustainability of optometric institutions and the profession.

References

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