

Marketing to

Expert advice to help you attract, and keep, the attention of Generation Y.

June Allan Corrigan



As a retailer, you've probably scratched your head about how to capture the interest of the elusive Millennial generation, but you certainly want to capture their business. The generation born between the early 1980s and the late 1990s now surpass the Baby Boomers in number. However the millennials have been difficult to

wrangle; industry experts have learned not to paint them with too broad a stroke, because their ages cover a close to twenty-year span, and they represent a wide range of lifestyles and experience.

Millennials could be cash-strapped 20-somethings living with their parents or they could just as easily be young marrieds with children and a mortgage. One thing millennials do share is an immersion in the digital world. If smart phones, computers and other devices weren't already pervasive the year they were born, millennials certainly came of age with technology at their fingertips. The real world battles mightily with the online world for their attention. So how can you get noticed by the millennials this holiday season? First, you have to make a connection.

Surmount all the noise

"Today we're all subjected to so much noise when it comes to how we find out about things. How do we trust things that we actually want to go buy or learn more about?" asks Jeff Ernst, Cofounder and CEO of Smync, a company that bills itself as The Social Word-of-Mouth Marketing Platform. Smync's business is essentially to provide brands and agencies with a tool kit to reach customers. Ernst customizes his point to the demographic under discussion by saying that the noise we all encounter is much more amplified in the case of millennials, with their constant attention to technology. It is therefore increasingly important to find creative ways to get their attention.

In the recent past, business owners felt they needed to post great content on their websites or run a compelling series of ads to attract millennials. This couldn't be further from the truth. A 2015 Forbes magazine study reported that only 1 percent of millennials surveyed said their trust in a brand can be influenced by an ad. "The problem is, if they don't trust it to begin with—because they don't know a

Millennials

This Holiday Season



company or brand, they don't care and they won't even take the time to digest the content," says Ernst. "You have to find a way of actually connecting with people that are within their groups, within their tribes to help them share an authentic experience or understanding. Those on the receiving end, will then say, oh, okay, now I can at least pay attention to the message."

Strive for authenticity

As a specialty retailer, you can implement Ernst's advice by paying attention to the millennials who are already in your customer base. Notice the ones who keep coming back for your product and engage them in conversation. "Literally start asking them, 'Hey, can we get you to share a little bit more about what we're doing?'" says Ernst. "And if

they really like you, they will, no strings attached, because three out of four millennials believe it's their duty to help their friends and the people around them make smarter purchasing decisions."

It's also helpful to note that millennials trust a recommendation coming from another person, and authenticity means a lot to this generation. "If you can engage even ten millennials who are your good customers and empower them to share things about your business, their reach will ripple out eight degrees deep," Ernst says. Using this kind of math, one millennial's reach could conceivably affect 40,000 people. Advocacy and word of mouth are the only ways to cut through the noise every generation is subjected to on a daily basis, but it is especially true for the millennial generation.



“The raw numbers speak for themselves,” says Ernst. “If someone recommends a product to you, a person whom you trust, you actually put your faith in that shared information and will move forward on it about 92 percent of the time. Comparatively, if the exact same content, the exact same message comes directly from a brand? The amount of trust that you’ll move forward with is about one-fourth as much—23 percent. Even worse is, if millennials realize someone is a paid endorser. Then it actually drops lower than if the brand spread the message themselves. Trust dips down to 18 percent.”

Millennials are savvier in regards to this form of advertising than baby boomers and they trust even less. Ernst draws a correlation to illustrate his point: Baby boomers were the first generation to have institutions fail them—pensions falling through, etc. Generation X was the first generation to have their individual heroes fail them: Bill Clinton’s scandal and Pete Rose gambling on baseball serve as perfect examples. “But what has happened with millennials is, they trust nobody. They trust the people they know and that’s it. They trust their tribe,” says Ernst.

Online vs. brick and mortar

There’s a persistent myth that because millennials are so technologically savvy, they prefer to do all of their shopping online. “Millennials do a lot of information-gathering online

but they still shop brick and mortar,” says Jeff Fromm, President of FutureCast, a marketing consultancy that specializes in millennial trends and modern consumer behavior. He’s also co-authored two books: *Marketing to Millennials* and *Millennials with Kids*. “Millennials click to purchase, too. The truth is they’re willing to buy things that excite them regardless of channel. It all depends on the category and consumer segment. For instance, it’s probably a little easier to buy travel online than it is to buy a suit,” he adds. Like countless generations of shoppers before them, millennials still want to pick a product up, feel fabric between their fingers, or even smell a potential purchase if that’s a selling feature. The appeal of a shopping experience that engages all the senses isn’t going away any time soon.

As a specialty retailer, you may draw comfort in knowing millennials continue to shop in person but there’s still the matter of factoring into their information-gathering phase. “Retailers, and particularly specialty retailers need to think about the millennial’s ability to consume more content from more sources more rapidly. Retailers need to understand their job is to curate, create and inspire content because I think there’s a direct line between content and subsequent consumer purchases,” says Fromm.

But doesn’t that contrast with previously outlined advice? Here’s where the word authenticity crops up yet again. The point is that once you’ve gotten their attention you need something honest and compelling to say. In a February 2016 report on Brand Authority that Fromm compiled with his team at FutureCast, he states: “Consumers today expect brands to be transparent and authentic. If you approach strategy in an automated way and simply adhere to traditional mass-marketing techniques, you will miss the valuable one-on-one connections with each consumer that builds the trust they are seeking. The most inspired brands have quickly realized this new paradigm shift and are instead leveraging their Brand Authority to help guide them towards a more authentic, human approach to marketing. Millennials want to hear about things that really matter, not the fluff that used to define advertising.”

Specific strategies

Okay, so far we’ve learned that millennials are a digitally plugged in generation but not beyond showing up in person at the mall. Much like soldiers on a military maneuver, they’ll do a lot of reconnaissance online before making a purchase but they’re likely to pay closer attention to content they’ve been alerted to by a peer. The question remains: if you’re a specialty retailer starting from scratch, how do you make those initial important contacts?

The Center for Generational Kinetics leads original research to solve generational challenges around the world. Co-Founder and Chief Strategy Officer Jason Dorsey, himself a millennial, offers some surprising and potentially game-changing insights on millennial quirks and characteristics. Here's an example: As a specialty retailer who's installed a kiosk, booth or pop-up shop in a mall setting, you've likely instructed sales associates to attract the attention of people walking by. In theory, that should work, right? "The challenge we find with that approach is that, for many millennials, face-to-face communication is uncomfortable ... and particularly face-to-face sales," says Dorsey. "Millennials can be very easily turned off by the hard sell or even by things like eye contact. For many millennials, it's more comfortable to look at a screen or to look at something else."

So how do you, as a specialty retailer, get around this issue? Dorsey advises specialty retailers that it's not so much a matter of getting millennials to come over and talk to a sales associate. It's more a matter of getting sales associates to invite them to come over and look at something. "Because millennials will stop to look at something long before they'll stop to talk to you," he says.

Based on that logic, major emphasis must be placed on developing eye-catching displays. Millennials are the most visual generation of retail consumers, according to Dorsey. They respond to compelling visuals but seldom bother to read a lot of accompanying text. Identifying signage must therefore be very easy to read, and it's crucial to avoid utilizing a script-style font. Why? Because many millennials were never taught cursive in school and literally can't read it. "Use easy-to-read fonts because millennials are the most advertised-to generation in history. They're also the most distracted generation of retail shoppers. Remember, their phones are going off 15 times while they're walking. If you



Holiday Sale Days: Advice from Our Experts



"Retailers hoping to draw attention to Black Friday and Small Business Saturday-type events among millennials need to start appealing early on to the people who are leaders in their groups so they can spread the word authentically."

—Jeff Ernst, Co-Founder and CEO of Smync



"I think that we'll see a lot of consumers looking at content well ahead of the holidays to try to figure out what they want to do. Retailers must plan accordingly and always remember that millennials are not a homogenous group."

—Jeff Fromm, President of FutureCast



"Cyber Monday is probably the big one for many millennials. Sale days in general are popular among millennials because some are trying to make the most out of having less money. So they want a deal. In fact, millennials do not expect to basically ever pay retail for anything, so that gives specialty retailers in the mall a real chance to win them by cost savings. But it needs to be crystal-clear how much they're saving. Because even things like percentages don't necessarily denote how big the savings are. So it could be you get 20 percent off or save \$20. Well, for a lot of millennials, saving \$20 sounds like a lot more than saving 20 percent, even if it's the exact same amount or if the \$20 actually works out to be less than the 20 percent."

—Jason Dorsey, Co-Founder and Chief Strategy Officer,
The Center for Generational Kinetics

don't quickly and easily draw their interest, you're going to miss them," says Dorsey.

Maintain momentum

So, say it's the holiday season, and you've taken Dorsey's advice to heart. Your clean, compelling signage has managed to capture a millennial's attention and has drawn him or her to your booth. The customer may even have paid heed to a sales associate's invitation to come over and look at something. Don't lose them there. "Maintain the conversation by continuing to look at whatever it is you're selling or talking about together," advises Dorsey. If what you're selling is more of a service than a hands-on product, a conversation can be kept up over a shared iPad. This is a less threatening approach than initiating eye contact immediately. "It's the complete opposite of how most other generations like to buy," admits Dorsey. "Other generations want to look you in the eyes. They feel it's a sign of respect." For millennials, it can be unnerving.

Looking at product information via a retailer-supplied shared iPad while easing into eye contact serves another purpose as well. Because millennials have no qualms about looking at ratings and reviews, or comparison shopping right on the spot on their own devices, offering a provided, shared iPad hampers their ability to search outside of your offerings, at least while they're digesting what's being shared with them on a retailer's screen. This could give you enough time to convince them to buy from you. Another tip is to give millennials a reason to take a picture at your kiosk with their own phone. It could be your great holiday display that they want to capture or perhaps include in a selfie. Within seconds, they'll be spreading the word through their social media outlets and delivering that much sought after authenticity.

Empower through point of purchase

If you've succeeded in capturing a millennial's attention, kudos! However, by no means does the process stop there. Fromm is a big advocate of something he calls "friction reduction." "How do you make the consumer journey more friendly before, during and after the shopping experience? Content is a piece of that but it's not the only thing. It's also knowing who the millennial is, anticipating his or her needs, and making it easy, not harder, for them to purchase. That's a way to create value," Fromm says.

As mentioned above, pigeonholing millennials is always mistake. For instance, there are 6.5 million affluent millennials making \$100K or more a year. A lot of millennials have children. They are far from being a homogenous group. "There's a big difference between selling to a 21-year-old boy



and selling to a 31-year-old woman with a young child," says Fromm. "Specialty retailers need to take all these variables into account—not just [in terms of] the products millennials want, but also their approach to communicating with them."

It practically goes without saying that obstacles at the point of purchase could quickly put an end to a prospective sale. "Make sure you take whatever form of payment millennials want to use," advises Dorsey. It could be Apple Pay, Paypal, a debit or credit card, even cash. Bear in mind, though, that the Center for Generational Kinetics did a national study that looked at millennials and their habits regarding cash. It discovered that almost a quarter [don't] carry five dollars on them [every day]."

Contrary to popular opinion, even less affluent millennials have money to spend. "They may not be able to afford larger purchases, but they do have money for small luxuries—those under-\$100 items that are oftentimes found at a kiosk, booth, or pop-up shop," says Dorsey.

"For millennials, those kind of purchases are really more likely than more expensive ones, which actually serves the specialty retail market quite well," he concludes. Which ends up being very good news indeed!

Freelance writer June Allan Corrigan addresses a wide range of topics, including business, medicine, parenting and education. Visit her website at junecorrigan.com.