

Marketing to millennials

 By [Nicholas Barenblatt](#)

30 Jan 2015

Around 10 million South Africans are aged between 18 and 33. These are the millennials, also known as Generation Y, and if you aren't factoring them into your marketing strategies already, you'd better hop to it.

In 15 years' time, they will make up three-quarters of the workforce. If your marketing strategy is focused solely on the paper age and a text-heavy website that entire market is going to be lost to you. Because the millennials are not paying attention.

They want their information in sound bytes and their delivery instant and instantly accessible. They scan over detailed messages and pan the environment for trends. Which is probably why predictions for wearable electronics show that they're going to explode on to the scene next year. According to Euromonitor International's Consumer Electronics research, sales are expected to shoot from nine million sold globally in 2013, to 180 million by 2016.

Whether you personally intend to wear the internet on your wrist by then is irrelevant: millions of your potential customers will be. If they can't access and read your site, because it's not adapted to mobile platforms, how do you plan to talk to them?

A recent survey done by *Cosmopolitan Magazine* South Africa found that 93% of a sample group of 3,500 South African millennials have a smartphone and about three quarters of them access social media and the web via their cellphones. Never mind print media - large screens are fast becoming quite *passé* to the 2.5 billion millennials who digitally roam the world daily as a matter of course.

Always connected

Here's what we know, beyond the shadow of a doubt, about the millennial market segment: it is tech-savvy and highly sophisticated.

Generation Y lives in the world - in all the world - in a way no generation before it was able to. People aged between 14 and 34 have grown up alongside technology, and social media's as much a part of their day as eating is.

They are confident, have high expectations and are achievement-oriented but, while they are ambitious, they want their work to make a difference in the world. They are socially and environmentally conscious, and prefer brands that reflect that ethic, and then they are deeply loyal to those brands.

They are almost always connected and - if wearable electronic forecasts are anything to go by - the sizes of the screens from which they're gleaning a view on to the world are shrinking.



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In summary, if your message isn't short, unambiguous and constant, your brand will drown. The World Travel Market Global Trends Report for 2014 puts it like this: "Travel companies will need to be swift to embrace wearable electronics as part of their strategies targeting always-connected consumers in order not to lose ground to competitors."

But simplicity and clarity of message are not enough. Marketing to millennials is not only about talking to them in tried and trusted - if somewhat truncated - ways. It is also about listening to them. Marketing is no longer a confident stride down a one-way street, but a complex dance between loyal, but stern customers and clients, and the keepers of the brand.

The two most obvious ways in which Generation Y takes its role as a dance partner very seriously are through its penchant for online shopping and its preference for interacting with brands via social media.

The first is an opportunity for making and keeping customers very happy. The second can be a minefield, as Generation Y has no compunction in complaining publicly when its expectations have not been met. If you make one person unhappy, 500 people can know about it within an hour. Conversely, if you make someone happy, you're going to leverage the power of social media's user-generated positive sentiment, without having to lift a marketing finger.

Into this complex mix comes the clients own involvement in brand promotion. The tourism industry is a good example with the rise of the "braggie". A "braggie" is a photo holidaymakers take within 10 minutes of arriving at their hotel. They are, in effect, bragging to their friends about where they are. These pictures are usually of a view from a hotel room, the room's bed and the surrounding landscape.

Increasingly sharing content

According to a survey by eMarketer, the number of social media users across the globe increased by 18% in 2013 to exceed 1.7 billion users. In 2013, an average of 350 million photos were uploaded to Facebook daily, 58 million pictures were uploaded to Instagram and WhatsApp saw 400 million images sent daily. If just a fraction of these are "braggies", the very customers hotels are targeting in their marketing campaigns, are an integral part of active brand communication and extension.

Hotels, restaurants and tour operators are responding to the entrance of millennials into their market segment by adopting features such as ensuring that all communications are mobile friendly, enhancements of the customer's online experience in terms of the engagement methods and the overall booking journey across multiple devices.

But besides ensuring that all the relevant technology platforms and channels are represented in your communication and distribution strategy, the main focus needs to be on how your product is going to serve and deliver on the needs of this new

emerging customer.

Millennial's are all about:

- *The need for speed, all the time*: this relates to efficient service and technology that makes their lives more convenient and efficient through apps.
- *Constant connectivity*: Wi-Fi and connectivity is no longer considered an amenity, it's a necessity.
- *People are the future for your marketing*: Perception is vital, and this generation will either ignite your brand and become ambassadors, or they will tell you and their followers why they don't like your brand.
- *Design matters*: The "Instagram effect" - does your brand give them something to share or brag about in terms of the visual appeal or the creative application of a product or service offering?

Global online travel sales amounted to US\$590bn in 2013, making up 27% of total travel sales. Mobile devices are increasingly key in the travel industry in terms of both customer service and bookings, and they are also becoming so for other industries that involve services of any sort. In travel, mobile bookings are expected to reach 35% of online travel bookings by 2018.

A staid and stagnant marketing strategy, like a staid and stagnant website - a traditional product experience - will serve neither the demanding and sophisticated millennial customer, nor any brand.

Marketers' jobs have become more multi-pronged, more interactive - both on the channel side as well as the brand experience side - and most certainly more tech-focused.

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