

# Interpreting Millennials

By Nicci Botha

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Back in the day, our forms of entertainment was riding bikes in the street or listening to *Squad Cars* on Springbok Radio on a Friday night. Television only made an appearance when I was 10 years old and children were seen, and not heard. Yeh, yeh, it sounds like middle-aged grumblings, but like many other Generation Xers, the tech savvy and outspokenness of Millennials still comes as a bit of a shock.



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But times have changed, and as David Blyth, CEO of brand strategy consultancy, [Yellowwood](#), points out, that old saying that the "youth is the future" is a truism. Or to quote John Cleese that statement belongs in the department of the bleeding obvious (in case you were wondering, you're definitely a Generation Xer if you understand what this means).

Yet it is these very different frames of reference which causes cross-generational miscommunication.

Yellowwood conducted a survey entitled [\*A Youth Lost in Translation\*](#) on Millennials to gain a better understanding on how to engage with them.

## Generational bias

- Assumptions 1: Born-free generation

"I personally don't like the label. They may be politically free, but they have more anxiety than other generations," Blyth says.

For example, they have fears about safety. In one interview Yellowwood conducted an 11 year old used the "paranoid" in his interview. Who knew what that word even meant 30 years ago?

The youth also insist they were their parents' investments and were therefore obliged to provide a return on that investment – that's where pressure lies, says Blyth.

- Assumption 2: The lost generation

It's important to understand that young people aren't buying the follow-the-leader mentality of their parents and grandparents. In other words when a person is entering workforce they aren't want the traditional vertical path of most corporates.

"We need to rethink how to integrate them into workforce. They don't necessarily want play by the rules, but want to know framework. Do we see them as rebels or revolutionaries and how we can use this to our advantage?" he says.

"They also see education as the most powerful weapon with which they can change the world. Educationalists are not necessarily getting the point that they need to change teaching styles to a stronger focus on peer-to-peer learning."

- Assumption 3: Gaming produces lazy thinkers

"On the contrary, gaming creates different kinds of brain flexibility and the ability to multitask. Employers need to find ways to use that talent," explains Blyth.

- Assumption 4: Broke members of society

"Millennials are in fact big spenders – not just in terms of money, but they see their voice as currency in its ability to influence and pester power, and we need to understand level of influence," he says.

- Assumption 5: Just respect me

Millennials want eye-to-eye engagement, and don't want to be talked down to.

## Quick tip for marketers

"You are not as superior as you think. Ignore Millennials' influence at your peril," concludes Blyth.

## ABOUT NICCI BOTHA

Nicci Botha has been wordsmithing for more than 20 years, covering just about every subject under the sun and then some. She's strung together words on sustainable development, maritime matters, mining, marketing, medical, lifestyle... and that elixir of life - chocolate. Nicci has worked for local and international media houses including Primedia, Caxton, Lloyd's and Reuters. Her new passion is digital media.

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