

Millennials are moving the market



By [Louise Marsland](#)

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Is it fair to say that marketers and brands don't understand the youth market and need to work a lot harder to collaborate on the right content? Or is it the bane of youth to be misunderstood until they are old enough to do the 'misunderstanding'?

The current so-called 'Millennial Generation' is the first generation of digital natives. They are just entering the workforce and starting to have a measurable and dramatic impact on the marketplace.

This misunderstood millennial generation is quite unique though, in that it is far more than the culture cut of their jeans or the shortness of their shorts or the slang they use or the music they listen to... They are the technological creation of our generation, growing up wired to the web, inhabiting new worlds, both online and at work, putting themselves almost out of reach of any traditional way of doing things, certainly in marketing.

This is a new world of creators and makers and collaborators, with blurred lines between real and reality, work and play. They expect brands to share their values when many brands are only learning what real values are.

With a job title that didn't exist a year ago, Gordon Geldenhuys, head of 'social listening' at digital agency, 25AM, says marketers have to think very differently about how to market to the millennial generation when it comes to everything from the messaging, strategies and channels.

Millennials are those individuals born between 1980 and the early 2000s - the young adults currently entering the workforce and starting to exert their influence on society and bringing their buying power to market. They are the first generation of digital natives.

"They're as different from the rebellious and individualistic Generation X as the Xers were from the baby boomers. As the first generation of digital natives, they think very differently about technology, brands, and the world, than do their parents and grandparents. Hyper-stimulated, always-on the-go, and socially and environmentally aware, they have consequently different expectations from the companies they deal with," explains Geldenhuys.

In fact, as he elaborates, theirs is a world where technology is push-button and convenient, which opens up new worlds of knowledge and opportunity to them, but in a harsh economy which makes them think differently about work and life values, because as Geldenhuys says, they might find it harder to find the high paying jobs that their older, Gen-X siblings did.

"As marketers, we need to think about the messaging, strategies and channels that are best to reach these young customers."

South Africa's *Cosmopolitan* magazine this week also released the findings of its biggest research report in years, '[Why Millennials Matter](#)'. It found that the South African millennial market compares well with global trends: "millennials are digitally savvy, career-focused and loyal to brands that share their values and evolve to meet the demands of their lifestyle," recounted New York-based millennial expert and consultant, Joan Snyder Kuhl, at the *Cosmopolitan* insights presentation.

Key findings include: shopping for millennials involves multiple mediums - in store, online and mobile; they are brand ambassadors for brands that share their values; they are financially savvy with 40% having a savings account and 62% saving for something; they are highly ambitious and dream careers include ones in which they can make money and be the boss.

"Having grown up wired, the world's millennials have a different relationship to technology and globalisation than the previous generation," added Kuhl. "Worldwide, 69% of Millennials believe 'technology creates more opportunities for all'. Whereas many workers in past periods viewed technology change and globalisation as forces that might take away their jobs, millennials tend to heartily support these dynamic forces. That may presage global changes in the politics of trade and attitudes toward life-long learning and career change."

Data from the Cosmo Millennials Survey indicate:

- 55% check a social media site, browse the web, use an app, make a call/text on their phone more than 20 times a day.
- 45% use a cell phone/smartphone and PC/desktop/laptop on a daily basis. 22% use these devices, as well as tablet on a daily basis.
- They are actively using multiple online platforms: 59% Facebook; 55% WhatsApp; 27% Twitter; 26% YouTube; 25% Instagram; 21% Pinterest.
- 74% choose to connect with companies on social media. Convenience, ease of use, and keeping up to date are the main drivers.
- Spending time online is driven by socialising with friends as well as family, learning something new, news updates as well as sharing content.
- 93% have a Smartphone.
- 76% access social media/web via their cellphone.

A social strategy

25AM's Geldenhuys has [five hints for marketers](#) trying to reach this market:

1. **"Yes, I can do two things at the same time"**: Brands need to craft multichannel strategies, mindful of how, where and why their millennial customers, for whom the second screen is second nature, use different screens and devices. These strategies need to offer consistent messaging, yet also work together to amplify the core message.
2. **"No, I cannot hold on for a minute"**: Youngsters have become accustomed to instant gratification and feedback - after all, friends reply to their WhatsApp messages right away and everything else is a Google search away. Brands need to ensure that all sales and services processes have strong feedback loops so that customers don't feel neglected.
3. **"I can help myself"**: Millennials have grown up with e-commerce, online banking, IVR and other self-service technologies. They see no need to spend hours in front of a customer service rep to complete an application or transaction. Brands need to offer streamlined digital processes that allow customers to seek information, transaction and interact quickly and easily. Offer them the information they need to empower themselves.
4. **"My life is part of a bigger story"**: Millennials' lives aren't defined by a grand narrative such as a world war, the great depression, or closer to home, the struggle against apartheid. Their world is one of accelerated change and the rapid rise of new technologies. In their search for meaning, millennials are eager to contribute to society and the world around them. They're passionate about the environment; they value tolerance; and often, they have firmly held social and political ideals. Brands need to show how they're contributing to the world and creating relationships of shared value.

5. **"I don't need professional advice"**: The influence that digital media has on purchasing intent is growing across all age groups, but it's especially significant among millennials - when making purchasing decisions, millennials tend to hold the opinions of their peers in higher esteem. Marketers need to be part of the social media conversation where their younger customers are discussing their products - thus, a social strategy is as important as a media strategy when marketing to millennials.

Collaborate!

Because today's youth are so invested in tech and online, they are bombarded with clicks and links and messaging, prioritising their friends and networks. For brands to reach them requires intelligent strategy and brilliant content.

Brands need to be more than just advertisers, they need to be "collaborators, creators and curators" of content, in partnership with various media and across mediums, according to TheDrum.com.

TheDrum.com reports that millennials expect "something tangible, something of value in return for their custom: tools and resources to help in other areas of their life; experiences; pleasure and rewards; support for the causes they feel passionate about".

The result is that many brands are also becoming "curators, producers and distributors of content" to be socially valuable currency - everything from the "extraordinary to the humorous". It's an inevitable trajectory of the new social journey, which has elevated great, shareable, sticky content to be the *Holy Grail* of marketing for brands.

In fact, sadly, brands seem to be investing and prioritising content more than media owners on stretched budgets are doing. It won't be long before brands develop their own media channels to meet the needs of their consumers...

Durex partnered with MTV's Staying Alive HIV/Aids prevention campaign in a three-year deal, launching the '[Someone like me](#)' campaign to get young people to talk about sex with the view to promoting safe sex education and an HIV-free world. This included a documentary 'My Sex Life and Everyone Else's' which aired on MTV internationally last year, plus online video and other resources and branded social media. The estimated reach is 200 million page views so far.

As TheDrum.com reports: "With Durex's backing, 'Someone Like Me' has now become a multi-territory sponsor of MTV's sex and relationship themed programming, including new reality dating hit 'Ex On The Beach', as well as a number of its high-profile live-music events such as the recent Isle of MTV spectacular in Malta, where a number of on-the-ground activations targeted the 50,000 revellers at MTV's largest open-air live music event. The climax of this year's activity will be title sponsorship of the MTV EMA 2014 in Glasgow, with a dedicated 'Someone Like Me' award and an in-store/on-pack promotion giving customers the chance to win tickets to the event."

That's certainly more than an advert or an event - it's a social movement.

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